INTRODUCTION

This is the third set of study guides that have been prepared to help people who are seeking to live victorious lives in Christ. In this series, emphasis is focused on facing our character defects head on and letting God do His good work in us to His honor and glory. To this end, five of the lessons deal with letting God change the faulty patterns of the mind - our thinking, reasoning, actions and intentions.

Character development is integral to the process of sanctification. It is God's desire that we "*share his divine nature and escape the world's corruption caused by human desires.*" (2Pet.1:4) Building on the biblical basis for change, these lessons dig deeper into the process of character reformation.

As stated in the introduction to Series 2, a meaningful relationship with Christ forms the basis for character restoration. Ellen White states, "Christ is waiting with longing desire for the manifestation of Himself in His church. When the character of Christ shall be perfectly reproduced in His people, then He will come to claim them as His own." (Christ's Object Lessons, p. 69)

Using a framework that follows the 12-Step Recovery format, this series provides for a thorough self evaluation and a process for restoration through an abiding relationship with the Divine.

The developers of the 'Hope and Healing' program trust that, through a growing relationship with God, you will find hope and meaningful help on your pathway to spiritual healing. May you experience the everlasting love of God, the redemptive love of Christ, and the infilling love of the Holy Spirit as you share these lessons of Hope and Healing.

Pr Leon N Powrie

for the Hope and Healing Team

Reedy Creek Seventh-day Adventist Church

Hope and Healing

Printable Lessons

Series 3.

Healing The Heart

HOPE AND HEALING

Healing The Heart

Series 3

Another set of thirteen Christ Centered Bible based discussion guides with a strong focus on character development and designed for use in a Twelve step Study Group

CREDITS

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The Hope and Healing Team would also like to acknowledge other authors and publishers that have been used in a limited way in these lessons and are referenced in situ.

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a. Finally, complete the spiritual self evaluation below.

Spiritual Self Assessment:

	Level of experience / practice											
Loving as God loves	Low	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	High
Happiness and joy	Low	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	High
Inner peace	Low	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	High
Patience & endurance	Low	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	High
Kindness & compassion	Low	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	High
Goodness & morality	Low	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	High
Faithfulness & commitment	Low	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	High
Gentle & considerate	Low	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	High
Self-control & composure	Low	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	High
Righteousness	Low	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	High
Living the truth	Low	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	High

b. How does this honest assessment affect your feelings about your spiritual self?

. . . . . .

The reality of who we are

Within the vastness of the universe, we are individually unique. The extent of human variance goes well beyond the limited variables covered in the four aspects of self we have just evaluated. As David says, "*I have been remarkably and wonderfully made.*" (Ps.139:14 HCSB) The nature or mystery of being has been a topic that has intrigued thinkers for millennia. We live in the reality of the present, the here and now, but when God says that He loves us with an everlasting love, that we are of inestimable value to Him (see Jer.31:3, Luke 12:7; John 3:16), and that "*God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners* " (Rom.5:8), we wonder why. Paul was being real when he wrote to Timothy these words, "*This is a trustworthy saying, and everyone should accept it: "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners"—and I am the worst of them all.*" (1Tim.1:15) We may not think highly of many aspects of ourselves, but the reality is that we are of infinite value to God. He is not willing that any be lost. (2Pet.3:9)

"God would not have us remain pressed down by dumb sorrow, with sore and breaking hearts. . . . He has loved us with an everlasting love and with loving-kindness compassed us about. We may keep the heart stayed upon Him and meditate upon His loving-kindness all the day. He will lift the soul above the daily sorrow and perplexity, into a realm of peace." (EGW, Reflecting Christ, p.364)

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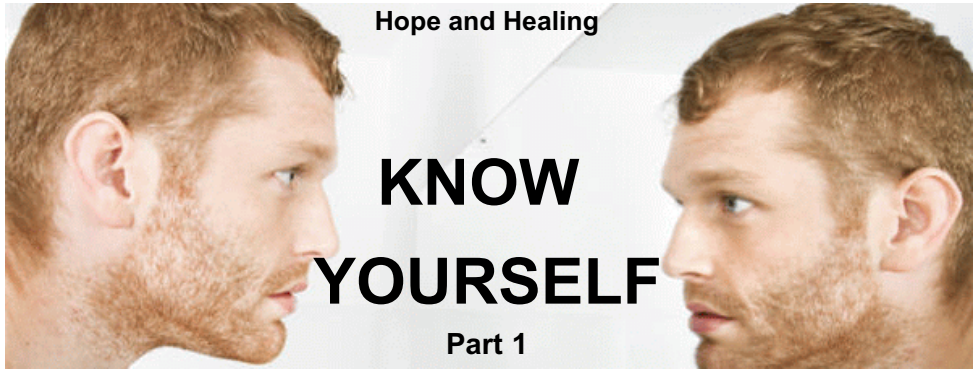

In His letter to the church of Laodicea Jesus says, "*You say, 'I am rich. I have everything I want. I don't need a thing!' And you don't realize that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked.*" (Rev.3:17) It seems that there is a serious misconception of self among those who dwell in this, the last church period before the anticipated second coming of Christ. While they entertain ideas of success and satisfaction, they are oblivious to the desperate baroness of their being. Could this scenario be describing our state of being. In this lesson and through this series we will seek to explore more forensically our soul condition and, through the surrender of self, open the doors of our hearts to Jesus. He is the one who is "*the beginning of God's new creation*", and the one who knows our true potential to live lives reflective of and for His glory.

In search of our true self

We are multifaceted beings encompassing physical, psychological, spiritual and social aspects. It was king David, who acknowledged the wonder of being when he declared that he was "*fearfully and wonderfully made.*" Yet we know that things can and do go wrong in our lives, and in this imperfect world, that have varying consequences on each and every aspect of our being. Let's explore our beingness and see if we can identify areas where **our lives may have become unmanageable**. (See Step 1)

1. **The Physical Self** - We are a part of a physical world and universe. When God created man and woman, he created them very good. There is built into our very nature an appreciation for proportion and beauty. Yet, within the physical realms of our beings there is immense diversity that is essential to our individuality and uniqueness. This is expressed through variables like gender, body form, size, function and attractiveness. Our perceptions **of** and regard **for** our physical self impacts upon our interactions with others. These perceptions are significantly coloured by the opinions and expectations of peers, family and society at large.

   a. Now complete the short physical self-evaluation on the next page.

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"*Don't think you are better than you really are. Be honest in your evaluation of yourselves, measuring yourselves by the faith God has given us.*" (Rom.12:3)

Physical Self Assessment:

Level of acceptance / satisfaction

Gender	Low	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	High
Body form	Low	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	High
Appearance	Low	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	High
Physical ability	Low	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	High
How others see me	Low	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	High
Body weight	Low	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	High
Sexuality	Low	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	High
Sensory function	Low	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	High

b. How does this honest assessment affect your feelings about your Physical self?

. . . . . .

2. **The Psychological Self** - The reality of being is lived out in the mind. In fact, our understanding and appreciation of all aspects of who we are is dependent on the best functioning of the mind. There is an inextricable relationship between the physical self and the psychological self, each impacting on the other and on all other aspects of life.

a. Now complete the psychological assessment below.

Psychological Self Assessment:

Level of experience

Self-worth	Low	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	High
Fear & phobia	Low	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	High
Emotionality	Low	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	High
Volatility	Low	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	High
Moodiness	Low	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	High
Attentiveness	Low	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	High
Addictiveness	Low	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	High
Habit/obsessiveness	Low	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	High
Dependency	Low	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	High
Honesty	Low	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	High

b. How does this honest assessment affect your feelings about your psychological self?

. . . . . .

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3. **The Social Self** - At the time of creation God said, "*It is not good for the man to be alone.*" Men and women were made with the urge to interact. We are gregarious communal beings that enjoy interpersonal and human-animal Interaction. As we mature, we develop a social network within which we are comfortable that is centered firstly around family, but spreads to include other groupings including classmates, work colleagues, church and club associates, neighbors, etc.. Unfortunately, fractures in relationships can arise from a multitude of contributing factors that impact on our social self.

a. Now complete the social self evaluation below.

Social Self Assessment:

Level of experience

Sense of belonging	Low	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	High
Making friends	Hard	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Easy
Family/spousal bonds	Weak	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Strong
Dependence	Co-	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Inde-
Circle of friends	Small	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Large
Coping with Isolation	Low	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	High
Friendship fragility	High	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Low
Peer/social influence	Neg.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Pos.

b. How does this honest assessment affect your feelings about your social self?

. . . . . .

4. **The Spiritual Self** - Man was created in the image of God with the ability to understand and appreciate our beingness. We are endowed with multiple qualities of being that are a reflection of the character of God, the highest of them being the capacity to love as God loves. Paul outlines a series of desirable, spiritual qualities in his letter to the Galatians. He says, "*But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control* " (5:22-23), and in another place adds the qualities of "*righteousness and truth.*" (Eph.5:9) These are but a sample of the many spiritual qualities (see box below) that we could possibly consider. Let us use these eleven qualities to examine our spiritual self.

Acceptance, accountability, affection, assertiveness, assurance, attentiveness, caring, chastity, cleanliness, compassion, confidence, consideration, contentment, courage, courtesy, creativity, determination, devotion, diligence, discernment, duty, enthusiasm, excellence, flexibility, forgiveness, friendliness, generosity, gratitude, helpfulness, honesty, honour, hopefulness, humility, idealism, integrity, justice, loyalty, mercy, moderation, modesty, obedience, orderliness, perseverance, prayerfulness, purity, purposefulness, reliability, repentance, respect, responsibility, reverence, self-discipline, service, sincerity, steadfastness, submission to God, tactfulness, thankfulness, tolerance, trust, trustworthiness, truthfulness, unity, wisdom.

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In Summary:

P	ponder	"*Ponder the path of your feet, stay on the safe path.*" (Prov.4:26 NKJV/NLT) Through personal reflection we have come to a clearer understanding of our real self. We are able to admit that we have hurts, habits, addictions or compulsive behaviors that trouble us.
O	own our being	"*For I recognize my rebellion; it haunts me day and night.*" (Ps.51:3) We take ownership and responsibility for who we are - our thoughts, feelings, emotions and actions.
W	wretched	"*Oh, what a miserable* [wretched] *person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin and death?"* (Rom.7:24) We share the same feelings of failure as did the apostle Paul - but find hope in Jesus Christ. (see V.25)
E	examine	We have assessed the physical, psychologic, social and spiritual aspects of our being. We respond to the admonition of Paul which says, "*Examine yourselves to see if your faith is genuine. Test yourselves.*" (2Cor.13:5)
R	respond	"*We acknowledge our wrongs, LORD. We have, like our fathers, failed to meet your standard.*" (Jer.14:20 par.) We respond positively by being willing to acknowledge and admit our imperfections and failures. The 5th step says, "Admitted to God, to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs."
L	learn	Jesus, the teacher, said, "*Come to me*" and "*learn of me*". This learning is achieved by taking His "*yoke*", entering into a trusting, covenantal relationship where we, the learner, are ready to follow the steps of the teacher we are yoked to. (see Matt11:28-29)
E	embrace	We are ready to embrace the process of character restoration that will bring us to true peace and rest, and the acceptance of who we are, and becoming, in Christ.
S	stop struggling	Learning comes from letting go and letting Christ teach us. Learning comes from accepting what we are taught, and then putting it into practice with the support and guidance of our partner (Jesus) with whom we are yoked.
S	surrender self	to the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. "*For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love.*" (Rom.5:5)

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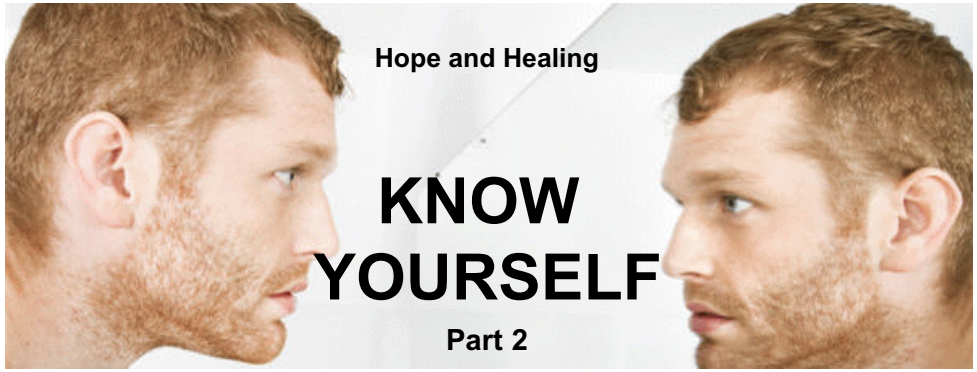

In the previous lesson we explored a range of variables that contribute to our individual uniqueness. We tried to be honest in our assessment of self and, in so doing, may have identified aspects of our being that we are not entirely comfortable with. In all honesty, there are areas of our beingness that we find difficulty managing. The one area that most clearly defines who we are is our spirituality. Spirituality is inextricably linked to our character in an interactive way. The following two short quotations demonstrate this interactivity and interdependence.

> "Spiritual prosperity continues only so long as man depends wholly upon God for wisdom and for perfection of character." (EGW, Counsels on Stewardship, p.147)
>
> "In order for our character building to be pleasing to God, we must constantly advance in spirituality." (EGW, In Heavenly Places, p.186)

In this lesson we will see that, in acknowledging and accepting who we are and where we are at in life's journey, we will be able to move forward, step by step, in the process of character refinement and spiritual advancement. The first step in this 12 step program states:-

> **"We admitted we were powerless over our hurts, habits, addictions and compulsive behaviors, that our lives had become unmanageable."**

Acknowledging who we are

The first promise given by Jesus in His 'Sermon on the Mount' is addressed to those who are experiencing spiritual poverty, who acknowledge their destitute, powerless and helpless state. Jesus said, "*Blessed* (happy) *are the poor in spirit . . .*"(Matt.5:3) Spiritual poverty leads to spiritual hunger. Some of us have suppressed this hunger with hurts, habits, addictions, and behaviours that mask our real state. Like an anorexic, we can have a distorted sense of self that locks us into a powerless and unmanageable state. In acknowledging and admitting that our characters are flawed, we open our lives to the real possibility of experiencing life-transforming spiritual growth and character development.

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Meditate on the significance of what is being expressed in the following quotation from the 'thought' statement for step 1, and then consider the experience of King David:-

> "The nearer we come to Jesus, and the more clearly we discern the purity of His character . . . the less shall we feel like exalting ourselves. There will be a continual reaching out of the soul after God, a continual, earnest, heartbreaking confession of sin and humbling of the heart before Him. At every advance step in our Christian experience our repentance will deepen."
>
> (EGW, Acts of the Apostles p.561)

One evening King David went out on the roof of his house, possibly to enjoy the balminess of the evening air and watch the play of light as the sun set in the west. From his vantage point he saw a beautiful woman bathing. His lust for her led him into a sequence of actions including adultery and murder. (cf. 2Sam.11)

> "*So the LORD sent Nathan the prophet to tell David this story: "There were two men in a certain town. One was rich, and one was poor. The rich man owned a great many sheep and cattle. The poor man owned nothing but one little lamb he had bought. He raised that little lamb, and it grew up with his children. It ate from the man's own plate and drank from his cup. He cuddled it in his arms like a baby daughter.*
>
> *"One day a guest arrived at the home of the rich man. But instead of killing an animal from his own flock or herd, he took the poor man's lamb and killed it and prepared it for his guest.*
>
> "*David was furious. "As surely as the LORD lives," he vowed, "any man who would do such a thing deserves to die! He must repay four lambs to the poor man for the one he stole and for having no pity.*"
>
> *"Then Nathan said to David, "You are that man! . . . For you have murdered Uriah . . . and stolen his wife.""* (2 Sam. 12:1-9)

Discussion:

1. David wrote a psalm after this unfortunate chapter of his life in which he says,"*For I recognize my rebellion; it haunts me day and night.*" (Ps.51:3) Is there anything in our self-assessment that 'haunts' us?
2. We all may have some kind of skeleton in the cupboard, something that we want to hide, something we are ashamed of, or thoughts and feelings that trouble us. Share how these kind of feelings can affect our day to day lives?
3. In the same psalm David expressed a deep desire for change using verbs like 'wash', 'purify', 'remove', 'restore', 'create', 'make me willing'. Discuss how these same verbs reflect our own desire for change.

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Accepting who we are

Earlier in David's reign as king over Israel, he aspired to build a permanent temple to replace the portable tabernacle that had been in use now for some four-hundred years. But Nathan the prophet brought a message from God in which he was told that it would be his son, not him, who would build the temple. "*Then King David went in and sat before the LORD and prayed, "Who am I, O Sovereign LORD, . . . You know what your servant is really like."* (2 Sam.7:18,20) Yes, while God knows what we are really like, have we come to accept the reality check of who we are?

Let us consider the young prophet, Isaiah. Early in his role as a prophet he was given a vision of the Lord seated upon a throne high and lifted up within the Temple. This glorious sight prompted him to cry out, "*Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!* " (Isa.6:5) The quotation on the previous page presents us with a similar situation. It says,"The nearer we come to Jesus, and the more clearly we discern the purity of His character . . . the less shall we feel like exalting ourselves." We will honestly accept who we are and admit that, of ourselves, we are powerless over the hurts, habits, addictions and compulsive behaviors that dog our daily lives. In response to Isaiah's cry of utter unworthiness before the very presence of God, a heavenly being took a coal from off the altar, brought it to Isaiah and touched his lips. Then he said, "*See, this coal has touched your lips. Now your guilt is removed, and your sins are forgiven.*" (Isa.6:7) It is only as we acknowledge the imperfections of our human state and accept that this is what and who we presently are, that God can offer a solution that will release us from the hopeless inadequacy of our own human effort.

Discussion:

1. David was a warrior who had shed much blood and for this reason he would not have the honor of building a temple to the glory of God. (1Chron.28:3) Yet he humbly accepted what he had been told. Discuss.
2. Contemplate the awe inspiring revelation that Isaiah experienced. Read the full account of it in Isa. 6:1-10, then discuss those aspects that resonate with you personally.
3. A translation of the Septuagint version of verse nine reads, "*You will listen carefully but not understand. You will look closely but not perceive.*" Explore the external and internal influences that numb our senses to our life experience and who we really are.
4. Consider how humility and pride could variously affect our view of self. How does the pattern of life modeled by Jesus impact our thinking of self?

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gives birth to spiritual life." (John 3:6) In activating spiritual life in us, the Holy Spirit opens to us the opportunity to share in the divine nature of love. "*For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love.*" (Rom.5:5) As we "*let the Holy Spirit guide [our] lives . . . [we] won't be doing what our sinful nature craves*," rather we will begin bearing the fruits of the Holy Spirit which are "*love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.*" (Gal.5:16,22-23) What is more, "*God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of* ***power and of love and of a sound mind***." (2 Tim.1:7)

Ponder God's Loving Grace toward us and the deeper message in the following acrostic:

K -	kneel	"*Come, let us worship and bow down. Let us kneel before the LORD our maker.*" (Ps.95:6)
N -	now	"*Now all of us can come to the Father through the same Holy Spirit because of what Christ has done for us.*" (Eph.2:18)
O -	open the door	"*Look! I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal together as friends.*" (Rev.3:20) "*But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.*" (2 Cor.3:18 KJV)
W -	wait	"*The LORD is good to those who wait for Him, to the soul who seeks Him. It is good that one should hope and wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD.*" (Lam.3:25-26)

G -	give glory	"*All glory to him who alone is God, our Savior through Jesus Christ our Lord. All glory, majesty, power, and authority are his before all time, and in the present, and beyond all time! Amen.*" (Jude 1:25)
O -	our hope	"*We put our hope in the LORD. He is our help and our shield. In him our hearts rejoice, for we trust in his holy name. Let your unfailing love surround us, LORD, for our hope is in you alone.*" (Ps.33:20-22)
D -	divine nature	"*God has given us everything we need for living a godly life* " and makes it possible for us *"to share his divine nature and escape the world's corruption caused by* [our] *human desires.* " (2 Pet.1:3-4)

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The idea that we can know God personally, that we can enter into a bonded covenantal relationship with Him, is difficult for us to grasp. We know who we are, that we are *"wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked"*(Rev.3:17), that we are powerless over our hurts, habits, addictions, and compulsive behaviours. Out of this admission comes a desire for change, for release from the wretched state of our shame and guilt. This is where the second step toward healing becomes relevant. It says,

> **Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.**

This is an acknowledgment that we need help. We need help from one who knows and understands our very being, who can put his finger on the very problem and who is well able to work a transformation in our lives. One whose inherent nature is to heal, who is always ready to restore those who are contrite and lowly in spirit and who declares, "*I will heal them.*" (Isa.57:18; cf. Vss. 15-19).In this step, we seek to come into a more meaningful and healing relationship with our all-powerful maker-sustainer, our redeemer-guarantor and the one who restores, guides and comforts.

Know our All-powerful Maker

Hosea expresses our desire with these words, "*Oh, that we might know the LORD!"* (Hos.6:3) It is not enough to just know about God. What we need to know and understand is our total dependence on our creator-sustainer. In acknowledging the greatness of God, the apostle Paul declares, "*everything comes from him and exists by his power and is intended for his glory."* (Rom.11:36)

John, in vision, heard heavenly beings make these declarations, "*Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty—the one who always was, who is, and who is still to come. . . . You are worthy, O Lord our God, to receive glory and honor and power. For you created all things, and they exist because you created what you pleased*." (Rev.4:8,11). It is our privilege to know our creator, and, as Micah points out, to walk humbly with our God. (Micah 6:8)

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Jesus made some profound statements the night before His crucifixion. He was talking with His disciples and said, "*"No one can come to the Father except through me. . ." Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father" . . . Jesus replied, . . . "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father!"*" (John 14:6-9) We come to know our creator God through Jesus who is 'the Word' who was God and who became flesh to reveal God to mankind.(John 1:1,14; cf. Matt.11:27; Luke 10:22)

In Peter's last message to the faithful, written just before he was martyred, he presents these powerful words of encouragement.

"*May God give [us] more and more grace and peace **as [we] grow in [our] knowledge of God and Jesus our Lord**. By his divine power, God has given us everything we need for living a godly life.*

*We have received all of this by **coming to know him**, the one who called us to himself by means of his marvelous glory and excellence. And because of his glory and excellence, he has given us great and precious promises. These are the promises that **enable [us]** to **share his divine nature** and **escape the world's corruption caused by human desires**.*

*In view of all this, [let us] **make every effort to respond to God's promises**. Supplement [our] faith with a generous provision of moral excellence, and moral excellence with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with patient endurance, and patient endurance with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love for everyone. **The more [we] grow like this, the more productive and useful [we] will be in [our] knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ**."* (2 Pet.1:2-8 adjusted to the first person and bolding added)

Discussion:

1. As we grow in our knowledge of God we become recipients of an increasing quantity of two essential gifts, grace and peace. Discuss the relationship between these two gifts and our relationship with God.
2. Share how God's "great and precious promises" have enabled you to "share his divine nature". Discuss the concept of 'divine nature' and how it relates to character development.
3. Consider these scriptures - 1 Cor.10:31; Rom.15:7; 2 Cor.3:18; Phil 1:11; 2:11; Discuss how we can give glory to God. How does entering into a covenantal relationship with God bring Him glory?
4. What does it mean to be productive and useful in the knowledge of God?

Looking unto Jesus we obtain brighter and more distinct views of God, and by beholding we become changed. Goodness, love for our fellow men, becomes our natural instinct. We develop a character which is the counterpart of the divine character. Growing into His likeness, we enlarge our capacity for knowing God. (EGW. Christ Object Lessons, p.355)

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Know our Redeemer

"*You, O LORD, are our Father; **Our Redeemer from Everlasting** is Your name.*" (Isa.63:16NKJV) These words reflect a theme throughout the Bible. God has expended much to rescue us from the fallible and faulty state we find ourselves in and to reconcile us to himself. Paul puts it this way, "*Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, . . .* " (2 Cor.5:18) He says, "*God paid a high price for you, so don't be enslaved by the world.*" (1 Cor.7:23) He gave us His only Son, Jesus, to rescue us from the soul-destroying consequences of our faults and failings - our sin. (Cf. John 3:16)

Through Jesus, God tabernacled with us. "*So the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son*" . . . "*who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin."* (John 1:14 NLT; Heb.4:15 ESV)

"*You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. [Who], being in the form of God, . . . did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross.*

"*Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor and gave him the name above all other names, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."* (Phil.2:5-11)

Time for reflection

1. Quietly contemplate the words we have read about our Redeemer who risked everything so that He could rescue us and restore us to His image, that is, to sanity.
2. Bask in the glorious love of God so wonderfully expressed in the willing servitude of Christ and His ultimate suffering and sacrifice for our redemption.

Know our Comforter

In the last words of instruction and assurance given by Jesus just before his arrest and crucifixion, he said, "*I will not abandon you as orphans—I will come to you.*" (John 14:18) He explained that God the Father, who was with us through Him, would provide another 'parakletos' - one who will be beside us to console or comfort, one who provides encouragement, uplifts and refreshes us, and who intercedes on our behalf as our advocate. Jesus said, "*But when the Father sends the Advocate* [Comforter] *as my representative—that is, the Holy Spirit—he will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I have told you.*" (John 14:26) Earlier in His ministry, Jesus told Nicodemus that *"the Holy Spirit*

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"*Trust in the LORD with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding.*" That's what Solomon advises, and he goes on to say, "*Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take.*" (Prov.3:5-6) Jesus said to Thomas, "*I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me.*" (John 14:6) Jesus also said, "*Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.*" (Matt.11:28) To trust God is to firmly believe in the integrity of His character, His truthfulness, honesty, and reliability. It is expressed in the way we respond to His advice, assurances, and corrections. It is a measure of how well we know and understand Him. The third step in restoring our characters states:-

Made a decision to turn our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.

Lessons in Trust

1. **A Real Life Example:**

   One pitch dark night a fighter pilot was flying in a sortie over enemy territory when the enemy's surface-to-air missile radar "locked on" to his aircraft. He violently maneuvered his aircraft to break the radar's lock on him. His maneuver was successful, but it created a new problem. Those radical movements caused him to become disoriented.

   His mind was telling him his plane was in a climbing right turn, but when he checked his instruments, they indicated he was in a 60-degree dive towards the ground! Because he was flying in total darkness, he had to decide quickly whether to trust his mind or his instruments. His life depended on making the correct choice.

   He decided to trust his instruments. He rolled his wings level and pulled his F-15 aircraft upward and out of its dive. It only took a few moments to realize he had made the right decision. If he had lowered the nose of his jet like his mind had been telling him, he would have crashed the plane. Trusting his instruments saved his life!

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My cup overflows with blessings

"*Oh, what joy for those whose disobedience is forgiven, whose sins are put out of sight. Yes, what joy for those whose record the LORD has cleared of sin.*" (Rom. 4:7:8)

Surely your goodness and unfailing love will pursue me all the days of my life,

"*But I trust in your unfailing love. I will rejoice because you have rescued me. I will sing to the LORD because he is good to me.*" (Ps.13:5-6)

and I will live in the house of the LORD forever.

"*Don't let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust also in me. There is more than enough room in my Father's home. If this were not so, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? When everything is ready, I will come and get you, so that you will always be with me where I am.*" (John 14:1-3)

Ponder The Promises

1. Spend a few moments contemplating the implications of trusting and following the Good Shepherd.
2. What does it mean to us when God says, "*I am the LORD, I do not change*" (Mal.3:6), when we are assured that "*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever*" (Heb.13:8), and "*The LORD is good, a strong refuge when trouble comes. He is close to those who trust in him.*" (Nah.1:7)?
3. What happens when there is a breach of trust? Discuss how misplaced trust or misinformed trust can impact on a person's state of being.
4. "*You have so little faith, Why did you doubt me?*" (Matt.14:31) Jesus said to Peter when he took his eyes off Jesus while walking on the water. Discuss the origins and impact of doubt and the implications it has on our ability to trust.
5. Consider sharing your personal experience with matters of trust.
6. Meditate on what it means to trust God wholeheartedly, then formulate your own declaration of trust in God.

   .. . .

   .. . .

   .. . .

"When we trust God fully, when we rely upon the merits of Jesus as a sin-pardoning Saviour, we shall receive all the help that we can desire."

EGW, Patriarchs and Prophets, P.431

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2. **A Biblical Example:**

"God had called Abraham to be the father of the faithful, and his life was to stand as an example of faith to succeeding generations. But his faith had not been perfect. He had shown distrust of God in concealing the fact that Sarah was his wife, and again in his marriage with Hagar. That he might reach the highest standard, God subjected him to another test, the closest which man was ever called to endure." (EGW, Patriarchs and Prophets, p.147)

God called to Abraham one night and said, "*Take your son, your only son—yes, Isaac, whom you love so much—and go to the land of Moriah. Go and sacrifice him as a burnt offering on one of the mountains, which I will show you.*

The next morning Abraham got up early. He saddled his donkey and took two of his servants with him, along with his son, Isaac. Then he chopped wood for a fire for a burnt offering and set out for the place God had told him about. On the third day of their journey, Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance.

"Stay here with the donkey," Abraham told the servants. "The boy and I will travel a little farther. We will worship there, and then we will come right back." So Abraham placed the wood for the burnt offering on Isaac's shoulders, while he himself carried the fire and the knife.

As the two of them walked on together, Isaac turned to Abraham and said, "Father?" "Yes, my son?" Abraham replied. "We have the fire and the wood," the boy said, "but where is the sheep for the burnt offering?" "God will provide a sheep for the burnt offering, my son," Abraham answered. And they both walked on together.

When they arrived at the place where God had told him to go, Abraham built an altar and arranged the wood on it. Then he tied his son, Isaac, and laid him on the altar on top of the wood. And Abraham picked up the knife to kill his son as a sacrifice.

At that moment the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!" "Yes," Abraham replied. "Here I am!" "Don't lay a hand on the boy!" the angel said. "Do not hurt him in any way, for now I know that you truly fear God. You have not withheld from me even your son, your only son."

Then Abraham looked up and saw a ram caught by its horns in a thicket. So he took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering in place of his son. Abraham named the place Yahweh-Yireh (which means "the LORD will provide"). (Gen. 22:2-14)

Discussion Questions

1. When is trust really trust?
2. How does the opening proverb have relevance in these two stories?

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Trust the Shepherd

The Shepherd's Psalm	The Shepherd's Assurances A Reason to Trust
The LORD is my shepherd;	"*I am the good shepherd.*" says Jesus, "*The good shepherd sacrifices his life for the sheep.*"(John 10:11) "*[We] follow him because [we] know his voice.*" (V.4)
I have all that I need.	"*And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.*" (Phil.4:19)
He lets me rest in green meadows;	"*Then Jesus said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.*" (Matt.11:28)
he leads me beside peaceful streams.	"*To all who are thirsty I will give freely from the springs of the water of life. . . proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.*" (Rev.21:6;22:1)
He renews my strength.	"*The LORD is . . . My God, my strength, in whom I will trust;*" (Ps.18:2)
He guides me along right paths,	"*When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide [us] into all truth.* " (John 16:13)
bringing honor to his name.	"*Then I will praise God's name with singing, and I will honor him with thanksgiving.*" (Ps.69:30)
Even when I walk through the dark valley of death, I will not be afraid,	"*I am the living one. I died, but look—I am alive forever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and the grave.*" (Rev.1:18)
for you are close beside me.	"*The LORD has told [us] what is good, and this is what he requires of [us]: to do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with [our] God.*" (Mic.6:8)
Your rod and your staff protect and comfort me.	"*Your throne, O God, endures forever and ever. You rule with a scepter of justice.*" (Ps.45:6)
You prepare a feast for me in the presence of my enemies.	"*Jesus replied, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry again. Whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.* " (John 6:35)
You honor me by anointing my head with oil.	"*Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.*" (2Cor.1:21-22)

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e. "*And so, dear friends . . . make every effort to be found living peaceful lives that are pure and blameless in his sight. And remember, our Lord's patience gives people time to be saved. . . . [G]row in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. All glory to him, both now and forever! Amen.*" (2 Peter 3:14-15,18)

In Summary

G	grace, goodness and glory	"*For the LORD God . . . gives us grace and glory. . . [He] will withhold no good thing from those who do what is right.*" (Ps.84:11) "*But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: . . goodness, . . .*" (Gal.5:22)
O	orderliness	"*For God is not a God of disorder but of peace, as in all the meetings of God's holy people.*" (1Cor.14:33)
D	devotion	" *we are instructed to turn from godless living and sinful pleasures. We should live in this evil world with wisdom, righteousness, and devotion to God.*" (Tit.2:12)
L	love	"*Dear friends, let us continue to love one another, for love comes from God. Anyone who loves is a child of God and knows God.*" (1John 4:7)
I	inspired living	"*So I say, let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. . . the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.*" (Gal.5:17,22-23)
N	newness of life	"*For we died and were buried with Christ by baptism. And just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, now we also may live new lives.*" (Rom.6:4)
E	empowered	"*By his divine power, God has given us everything we need for living a godly life. . . to share his divine nature*" (2Pet.1:3-4)
S	sacrifice and service	"*I call upon you, therefore, brethren, through the compassions of God, to present your bodies a sacrifice -- living, sanctified, acceptable to God -- your intelligent service*" (Rom.12:1 YLT)
S	sanctified	"*Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*" (1Thess.5:23)

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CHOOSE GOD
CHOOSE GODLINESS

Choices! Choices! Choices!

We live in a generation focused on consumerism. We have been bombarded by so many choices that we, all too often, become either blasé about, or confused by, the array of equally attractive options presented to us. This is further complicated by the skepticism we have for the genuineness of the claims of value and quality pedaled by the purveyors of consumer products. We are gifted with the power of choice and God asks us to use it. In fact, millennia ago, the Lord made several declarations to the children of Israel that are just as relevant to us today as they were to them back then. He asked them and asks us to make some life-changing choices. Here are two of those declarations,

> "*Look, today I am giving you the choice between a blessing and a curse!* " (Deut.11:26)
>
> "*Now listen! Today I am giving you a choice between life and death, between prosperity and disaster.*" (Deut.30:15)

In these two statements are presented three pairs of options - a blessing or a curse; life or death, prosperity or disaster. But in each case, it is clear that only one of each pair would be attractive to any one of us. Also, it is clear that our choices have consequences and implications. The Lord goes on to reiterate the essence of these two 'either/or' statements just a few verses later. As we read this passage, let us identify who will witness our choice, God's interest in our decisions, and the key to a positive outcome from our choices.

> "*Today I have given you the choice between life and death, between blessings and curses.* ***Now I call on heaven and earth to witness the choice you make. Oh, that you would choose life****, so that you and your descendants might live! You can make this choice by* ***loving*** *the LORD your God,* ***obeying*** *him, and* ***committing*** *yourself firmly to him.* ***This is the key to your life.*** *And if you love and obey the LORD, you will live long in the land the LORD swore to give your ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.*" (Deut.30:19,20)

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Discussion

1. Our choices are being observed by two witnesses. How do you relate to being watched? Share how being watched has impacted your choices. Who is watching us today?
2. God, who has given us the power of choice, has a vested interest in our decisions. *"Oh, that you would choose life*" he pleads. Meditate on the thought that the Lord of Heaven and Earth longs to see us make positive choices.
3. Determine the three elements that make up the key to a positive choice outcome.
4. Consider the universality of this call to choose. When was it first made?
5. Read the following two paragraphs and determine what we can and cannot choose to do.

   "God has given us the power of choice; it is ours to exercise. We cannot change our hearts, we cannot control our thoughts, our impulses, our affections. We cannot make ourselves pure, fit for God's service. But we can choose to serve God, we can give Him our will; then He will work in us to will and to do according to His good pleasure. Thus our whole nature will be brought under the control of Christ.

   "Through the right exercise of the will, an entire change may be made in the life. By yielding up the will to Christ, we ally ourselves with divine power. We receive strength from above to hold us steadfast. A pure and noble life, a life of victory over appetite and lust, is possible to everyone who will unite his weak, wavering human will to the omnipotent, unwavering will of God." (EGW, The Ministry of Healing, p.176)

The Noblest choice

"*May God give you more and more grace and peace as you grow in your knowledge of God and Jesus our Lord. By his divine power, God has given us everything we need for living a godly life. We have received all of this by coming to know him, the one who called us to himself by means of his marvelous glory and excellence.*

"*And because of his glory and excellence, he has given us great and precious promises. These are the promises that enable you to share his divine nature and escape the world's corruption caused by human desires.*

"*In view of all this, make every effort to respond to God's promises. Supplement your faith with a generous provision of moral excellence, and moral excellence with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with patient endurance, and patient endurance with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love for everyone.*

"*The more you grow like this, the more productive and useful you will be in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.*" (2 Pet.1:2-8)

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Explore

1. Identify, from the passage we have just read, the gifts God longs to give us.

   . . . . . .

2. Research the following selected Bible references and identify the "*great and precious promises* " contained in them. Jot down your findings.

   a. 1 John 1:9 . . . . . .

   b. 2 Corinthians 1:2-4 . . . . . .

   c. John 16:7-14.. . . . . .

   d. Isaiah 40:29-31. . . . . .

   e. Isaiah 41:10,13 . . . . . .

   f. Romans 8:37-39. . . . . .

   g. Philippians 4:19 .. . .

   h. James 1:5 . . . . . .

3. "Higher than the highest human thought can reach is God's ideal for His children. Godliness - Godlikeness - is the goal to be reached." (EGW, Education, p.18) In view of this statement, read the following verses and identify how Godliness is attained.

   a. "*Physical training is good, but training for godliness is much better, promising benefits in this life and in the life to come.*" (1Titus 4:8)

   b. "*Imitate God, therefore, in everything you do, because you are his dear children. Live a life filled with love, following the example of Christ. He loved us and offered himself as a sacrifice for us, a pleasing aroma to God. . . So live as people of light! For this light within you produces only what is good and right and true. Carefully determine what pleases the Lord. . . Don't act thoughtlessly, but understand what the Lord wants you to do.*" (Eph.5:1-2,8-10,17)

   c. "*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.*" (Gal.5:22-25)

   d. "*And the LORD passed before him [Moses] and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty. . .*" (Ex.34:6-7 NKJV)

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Discussion

1. In light of God's reconciliation plan through Jesus as expressed in verses like John 1:29-36; 3:16, and the many references to 'the Lamb' in Revelation, discuss what Paul means when he says, "*You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.*" (Phil 2:5)
2. "*But when you pray, go away by yourself, shut the door behind you, and pray to your Father in private.*" (Matt.6:6) Compare this statement of Jesus with the experience of Eddie Espinosa and the outpouring of his desire for change. Share your own response to God's desire to reshape you.

Restoring the Heart

The Lord promises, "*I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit in you. I will take out your stony, stubborn heart and give you a tender, responsive heart. And I will put my Spirit in you so that you will follow my decrees and be careful to obey my regulations. . . I will cleanse you of your filthy behavior.*" (Ezek.36:26-27,29) It's up to us to accept the offer.

Solomon admonishes us to "*Guard [our] heart above all else, for it determines the course of [our] life."* (Prov.4:23) Then, in the following verses, he offers us some salient advice that is both corrective and protective. He says:-

a. "*Avoid all perverse talk* [i.e. fraudulent, deceitful speech]*; stay away from corrupt speech.*" (Prov.4:24) Jesus makes a similar recommendation when he says, "*"But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.' For whatever is more than these is from the evil one.*" (Matt.5:37)

b. "*Look straight ahead, and fix your eyes on what lies before you.*" (V.25) Jesus says, "*When your eye is good, your whole body is filled with light. But when it is bad, your body is filled with darkness. Make sure that the light you think you have is not actually darkness.*" (Luke 11:34-35) Paul puts it this way, " *Let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith.* (Heb. 12:1,2)

c. "*Mark out a straight path for your feet; stay on the safe path. Don't get sidetracked; keep your feet from following evil.*" (Prov.4:26-27) Jesus says, "*I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me.*" (John 14:6) He also says, "*If any man serve me, let him follow me; and . . . him will my Father honour.*" (John 12:26) Paul admonishes us to "*Pursue righteousness and a godly life, along with faith, love, perseverance, and gentleness.*"

Sharing Time

"The love which Christ diffuses . . . frees the soul from the guilt and sorrow, the anxiety and care that crush the life forces."
(EGW, Mind, Character and Personality, p.50)

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LET GOD RELEASE ME
From
Hurts, Habits, Hangups and Obsessions

So far in this series we have come to know and understand ourselves a little better and, in effect, made a moral inventory and identified our weaknesses and our strengths (Steps 1-5). Having made a decision to trust God wholeheartedly, it makes the next steps easier. In this and the following three lessons, we will seek release from specific character defects by taking steps six and seven.

Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.

In this lesson, we want to seek release from our hurts, habits, hang-ups, and obsessions. But first, we need to clarify what we mean by these terms.

Hurts - The emotional pain caused by feelings of rejection and loneliness; the distress experienced as a result of loss or physical or mental trauma (including abuse); the self-inflicted pain of guilt, shame and self-abrogation; the consistent discomfort caused by continually chewing over past wrongs, that is constantly picking the scabs off old wounds; the bruising caused by the hammer blows of failure; and finally, the depleted or, like an allergic reaction, the over-sensitized emotional immunity of low self-esteem.

Habits - They are regularly repeated behavior patterns that become typical to the person. Included are all forms of addiction, for example, to alcohol, drugs or other substances whether ingested, injected or inhaled, food, gambling, pornography, sex, shopping, smoking, religion, or work.

Hangups - Are psychological or emotional roadblocks to resolution. They are negative mental attitudes that are used to cope with people or adversity and include such things as anger, depression, fear, unforgiveness, resentment and the like.

Obsessions - Are intrusive thoughts or fixations that can result in strong attachments to persons, ideas, beliefs or things and that can lead to compulsive, fanatical and, at times, aberrant behaviours.

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Putting it another way

We need release from all forms of twisted or 'stinking' thinking. Let us share how the following types of 'stinking thinking' are expressed in our lives:-

1. **All-or-nothing (or black-or-white) thinking** - If a situation falls short of perfect, we see it as a total failure.
2. **Over-generalization** - When we see a single negative event as being reflective of a continuing pattern of failure by using words such as "always" or "never" when we think about it.
3. **Mental Filtering** - We pick out a single negative detail and dwell on it exclusively, so that our vision of reality becomes darkened.
4. **Discounting the positive** - By rejecting positive experiences, we take the joy out of life. This makes us feel inadequate and unrewarded.
5. **Jumping to conclusions** - We interpret events without reference to facts that may support or negate our conclusions. This results in presumption and false predictions.
6. **Magnification** - Is when we exaggerate the importance of our problems and shortcomings, or we minimize the importance of our desirable qualities.
7. **Emotional Reasoning** - Is when we use the way we feel as an argument for a position we take. For example, "I feel hopeless. I must really be hopeless."
8. **"Should", "Must", "ought" and "have to" statements** - Such statements are demanding of self and others, and foster feelings of guilt, frustration, rebellion, anger, and shame.
9. **Labeling** – When we say, "I'm a loser", or "he's a failure" we are making a judgment based on performance expectations. Such thinking can lead to anger, anxiety, frustration and low self-esteem.
10. **Personalization and Blame** - Personalization comes when you hold yourself personally responsible for an event that isn't entirely under your control. It leads to guilt, shame, and feelings of inadequacy. On the other hand, when we blame others or our circumstances for the problems we encounter, we tend to overlook how we may have contributed to the problem. (Based on Ten Forms of Twisted (Stinking) Thinking, The Feeling Good Handbook, by David D. Burns, M.D.)

A Matter of the Heart

The Psalmist, David, expresses the same dilemma that dogs each of us when we consider the machinations of our mind. He wrote, "*How can I know all the sins lurking in my heart? Cleanse me from these hidden faults.*" (Ps.19:12) And then, when he acknowledges that he has allowed these 'hidden faults' to mature into open acts of adultery, dishonesty, trickery, and murder, he cries out, "*Wash me clean from my guilt. Purify me from my sin.*" (Ps.51:2) Not only does David ask for forgiveness and release from the burden of guilt, but, more importantly, he adds, "*Create in me a clean heart, O God. Renew a loyal spirit within me.*" (V.10)

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During a time of private devotions, Eddie Espinosa had a personal encounter with the Lord. He says,"sin and attitudes of the heart were suddenly glaring me in the face. I realized that in order for me to walk uprightly before the Lord, I needed a heart transplant. I desperately needed for God to change my heart in order to love the things that He loves and to hate the things that He hates. I also was aware that only He could change my heart. I began to sing without paying attention to the melody, it just flowed from the depths of my being." From that heart cry came the song, "Change My Heart Oh God".

Change my heart oh God, make it ever true.
Change my heart oh God, may I be like You.
You are the potter, I am the clay,
Mold me and make me, This is what I pray.
Change my heart, oh God, make it ever true.
Change my heart, oh God, may I be like you.

In this song, Eddie Espinosa draws from the experience of Jeremiah who received a directive from God. "*He said, "Go down to the potter's shop, and I will speak to you there." So I did as he told me and found the potter working at his wheel. But the jar he was making did not turn out as he had hoped, so he crushed it into a lump of clay again and started over. Then the LORD gave me this message: "O Israel, can I not do to you as this potter has done to his clay? As the clay is in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand.*" (Jer.18:1-6)

Moses describes the heartache of God when he observed the state of the antediluvian world. He wrote, "*The LORD observed the extent of human wickedness on the earth, and he saw that everything they thought or imagined was consistently and totally evil. So the LORD was sorry he had ever made them and put them on the earth.* ***It broke his heart.***" (Gen.6:5-6 emphasis supplied) But God saw one faulty family that he could place his hope in. The scriptures say "*But Noah found favor with the LORD.*" (V.8)

God's desire for the restoration of humanity to its pristine perfection is expressed in His words, spoken through Jeremiah, "*For I know the plans I have for you," . . . "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.*" (Jer.29:11) "*The Lord . . . does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants everyone to repent.*" (2 Pet.3:9) He says,"*My thoughts are nothing like your thoughts, . . .And my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine.*" (Isa.55:8) He really wants to replace our faulty thought patterns that defile us (see Matt.15:19-20) and to impart to us His divine nature (see 2 Pet.1:4). Clearly, hurts, habits, hangups, and obsessions can affect our physical, mental and spiritual well-being. Solomon rightly suggests, "*A peaceful heart leads to a healthy body; jealousy is like cancer in the bones.*" (Prov.14:30)

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LET GOD REMOVE MY Hypocrisy

Nobody likes being called a hypocrite. But the reality is, we all have a whole wardrobe of masks that we wear for different occasions that are little more than pretense or, dare we admit it, bordering on the hypocritical. Some are attached to our life's roles like the mother mask or the socially acceptable mask. All too often we wear a facade that does not reflect the inner state of being, the disingenuous smile, the polite, politically correct polemic, or those thinly disguised attempts to cover a titbit of gossip under a veil of compassion and concern. Our masterly performance on the stage of life may only mask the reality of who we really are.

The Nature of Hypocrisy

Hypocrisy takes two forms:

a. Professing belief in something and then acting in a manner contrary to that belief. An example of this type of hypocrisy is found in the words of God spoken through Isaiah.

"*These people say they are mine. They honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. And their worship of me is nothing but man-made rules learned by rote. Because of this, I will once again astound these hypocrites . . . What sorrow awaits those who try to hide their plans from the LORD, who do their evil deeds in the dark! "The LORD can't see us," they say. "He doesn't know what's going on!" How foolish can you be? He is the Potter, and he is certainly greater than you, the clay!*" (Isa.29:13-16)

b. Looking down on or being critical of others when we ourselves are flawed. Jesus gives us an example of this form of hypocrisy in the sermon on the mount.

"*And why worry about a speck in your friend's eye when you have a log in your own? How can you think of saying to your friend, 'Let me help you get rid of that speck in your eye,' when you can't see past the log in your own eye? Hypocrite! First get rid of the log in your own eye; then you will see well enough to deal with the speck in your friend's eye.*" (Matt.7:3-5)

Jesus was challenged by a group of Pharisees and scribes to explain why His disciples were not practicing the long-established tradition of ceremonial hand washing. He responded by saying "*why do you, by your traditions, violate the direct commandments of God?* " (Matt.15:3) He then gave an example of a

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3. "*Be especially careful when you are trying to be good so that you don't make a performance out of it. It might be good theater, but the God who made you won't be applauding.*" (Matt.6:1 MSG) Jesus is here warning against pretense, a precursor to hypocrisy. And He goes on to give examples of how to live unhypocritically. How to give without fanfare, how to pray but keep it private, and how to serve and worship God without show. (Read Matt. 6:2-18 and note the prayer in the box below)
4. Paul admonishes us to be authentic and genuine Christians. He says, "*Don't just pretend to love others. Really love them. Hate what is wrong. Hold tightly to what is good. Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honoring each other.*" (Rom.12:9-10) In another letter, he says, "*So be careful how you live. Don't live like fools, but like those who are wise. . . Don't act thoughtlessly, but understand what the Lord wants you to do. . . be filled with the Holy Spirit, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, and making music to the Lord in your hearts. And give thanks for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. And further, submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.*" (Eph.5:15-21)

Discussion:

1. Scan the smorgasbord of advice in this section and pick out the tasty bits, identify the tough bits and mark the morsels that may be tinged with bitterness.
2. Peter tells us to "*get rid of all evil behavior. Be done with all deceit, hypocrisy, jealousy, and all unkind speech.*" (1 Pet. 2:1) Elaborate on what constitutes a healthy spiritual diet. What would constitute spiritual junk food?
3. Meditate on the prayer in the box below. How can we pray it without hypocrisy?

Lord God, we thank You for the model of Jesus Christ our Savior who, when He walked this earth, dripped with authenticity. We long to be authentic as our Savior was - people who have a faith that's genuine, not a counterfeit religious piety.

Forgive us, Father, for the way we have subtly sought the applause of others, hoping they'd be impressed with our seeming humility or our facade of generosity or even our apparent authenticity. We pray that we'll be more effective in quietly honoring you, not to be seen of men, but to be of humble service to others.

Father, we pray that You will turn reproof into restoration and thereby change us so that we become like Christ. May we be so impressed with You that we lose sight of ourselves. And in that self-forgetful state, may we give You all the glory that You deserve. Amen.

Based on Charles R.Swindoll http://www.insight.org/resources/devotionals/overcoming-hypocrisy.html

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traditional practice that negated the command of God to honor their parents. He then rebuked them with the words, *"You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you*" and then quoted from Isaiah 29, "*These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship is a farce, for they teach man-made ideas as commands from God.*" (Matt.15:7-9)

There is a false security that can come from following the customs and traditions of any 'faith group' to the neglect of God's direct instructions. John the Baptist berated the people of his time for their complacency in trusting in their heritage rather than living fruitful lives of service. He said, "*You brood of snakes! Who warned you to flee God's coming wrath? Prove by the way you live that you have repented of your sins and turned to God. Don't just say to each other, 'We're safe, for we are descendants of Abraham.' That means nothing . . .* " (Luke 3:7-8) There is no security in sanctimony.

Jesus describes another manifestation of hypocrisy when he warns, "*Beware of false prophets who come disguised as harmless sheep but are really vicious wolves.*" (Matt.7:15) The mask of innocence hides a treacherous nature.

Discussion:

1. Towards the end of His ministry, Jesus confronts hypocrisy head on. Read Matthew 23 and then discuss manifestations of hypocrisy found in this chapter that are in society and the church today. (Be careful to not be hypocritical in your responses.)
2. Read 1 John 2:9-11. Is this a manifestation of hypocrisy? If so, what type and what are the implications?
3. Let us carefully consider and be prepared to concede the manifestations of hypocrisy in our own lives.
4. How is hypocrisy a breach of the 10 Commandments?

Problems in the Early Church

1. The spirit of unity in the early church community was marked by genuine generosity and a spirit of sharing. Those who were well-off sold property and shared the proceeds with those who were in need. "*But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession. And he kept back part of the proceeds, his wife also being aware of it, and brought a certain part and laid it at the apostles' feet. But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself? While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God."* (Acts 4:32-37;5:1-4)

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2. Paul, after explaining the celebration of the Lord's Supper, said, "*For every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you are announcing the Lord's death until he comes again. So anyone who eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord unworthily is guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. That is why you should examine yourself before eating the bread and drinking the cup. For if you eat the bread or drink the cup without honoring the body of Christ, you are eating and drinking God's judgment upon yourself.*" (1Cor 11:26-29)
3. "*But when Peter came to Antioch, I had to oppose him to his face, for what he did was very wrong. When he first arrived, he ate with the Gentile Christians, who were not circumcised. But afterward, when some friends of James came, Peter wouldn't eat with the Gentiles anymore. He was afraid of criticism from these people who insisted on the necessity of circumcision. As a result, other Jewish Christians followed Peter's hypocrisy, and even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy.*" (Gal.2:11-13)

Discussion:

1. Apply these three examples to our own experience today. In what ways can we be as hypocritical as the early church members and leaders? Is anyone immune from hypocrisy?
2. Is the struggle that Paul writes of in Romans 7:15-24 an admission of a hypocritical life experience? How about his apparent capitulation to Jewish practices recorded in Acts 21:24-26? Discuss how the complexity of communal engagement can result in moments of unwanted and embarrassing hypocrisy.

The Remedy for Hypocrisy

"No one can escape the charge of "hypocrite"- no one except Jesus Himself. He is the only One who has lived up to God's standards; the only One who has perfectly lived what He preached. Only through…Christ can we escape the penalty due our hypocrisy…By living within the security of Christ's love, we are free to peel off masks and to become real, honest people." (Cliff Knechtle, **Give Me an Answer**,1986, p.99)

1. "*Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus . . .*", says Paul (Phil.2:5) This is the ultimate answer to the problem of hypocrisy. In another place, Paul states, "*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.*" (2Cor. 5:17)
2. Peter, the disciple noted for his moments of hypocrisy, gives us the assurance that when we respond to the Lord's "*great and precious promises* ", we will be able "*to share* [in] *his divine nature* " (2Pet.1:4) A nature that promotes morality, wise understanding, masterly self-control, steadfastness, godliness, compassionate kindness, and a loving, benevolent spirit toward all. (2Pet.1:5-7)

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b. **Remedy** - "*Don't love money; be satisfied* [i.e. content] *with what you have. For God has said, "I will never fail you. I will never abandon you."*" Jesus said, "*Beware! Guard against every kind of greed. Life is not measured by how much you own.*" (Heb.13:5; Luke 12:15)

5. **Envy and jealousy**

a. **Example** - "*Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age. Also, he made him a tunic of many colors. . . . And his brothers envied him . . .*" (Cf. full context Gen.37:3-11) "*Once we, too, . . . were full of evil and envy, and we hated each other.*" (Tit.3:3)

b. **Remedy** - "*But—"When God our Savior revealed his kindness and love, he saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He washed away our sins, giving us a new birth and new life through the Holy Spirit.*" (Tit.3:4,5)

6. **Lust**

c. **Example** - "*Late one afternoon, after his midday rest, David got out of bed and was walking on the roof of the palace. As he looked out over the city, he noticed a woman of unusual beauty taking a bath. . . he was told, "She is Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite. Then David sent messengers to get her; and when she came to the palace, he slept with her.*" (2 Sam.2-4)

d. **Remedy** - "*And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise.*" (Phil.4:8) "*Incline my heart to Your testimonies, And not to covetousness. Turn away my eyes from looking at worthless things, And revive me in Your way.*" (Ps.119:36-37) See also Romans 13:14.

In Summary

C	claim	"He who truly believes in Christ is made partaker of the divine nature, and has power that he can appropriate under every temptation. He will . . . claim the promises, and by these escape the corruptions that are in the world through lust." (EGW, My Life Today, p. 274)
O	"on our knees	. . . we are to claim the promises of God's Word, asking that we may receive pure, unadulterated truth." (EGW, Lift Him Up, p.123)
V	venerate	"*Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe.*" (Heb.12:28 NIV)
E	emulate	"*Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:*" (Phil.2:5)
T	trust	"*Trust in the LORD with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take.*" (Prov.3:5-6)

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The last of the Ten Commandments speaks against covetousness. Covetousness, of all the Commandments, is a matter of the mind. It is not an action but an attitude. True, this attitude can have consequences played out in behaviours, but, of itself, it relates to matters of the heart. Jesus said, "*For from within, out of a person's heart, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed* [covetousness], *wickedness, deceit, lustful desires, envy, slander, pride, and foolishness.*" Would a person steal if at first, he didn't covet? How could adultery occur without first the adulterer coveting the other person's spouse? In essence, covetousness is a precursor to the breaking of every other command in the Decalogue.

A Background to Covetousness

The Biblical word, covet, is translated from several Hebrew and Greek words that have a range of meanings - to desire, crave, long for, lust after, to be greedy, to envy, take pleasure in, delight in, and to seek things forbidden. We first meet two of these words in Genesis when Eve " *saw that the tree was good for food, that it was **pleasant** to the eyes, and a tree **desirable** to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate.*"(Gen.3:6 NKJV) How seemingly innocent is the first expression of covetousness? The two Hebrew words translated as pleasant and desirable surface again in the two versions of the 10th Commandment.

> "*You must not **covet** your neighbor's house. You must not **covet** your neighbor's wife, male or female servant, ox or donkey, or anything else that belongs to your neighbor.*" (Ex.20:17)
>
> ""*You must not **covet** your neighbor's wife. You must not **covet** your neighbor's house or land, male or female servant, ox or donkey, or anything else that belongs to your neighbor.*" (Deut.5:21)

We see that the very first sin on this earth was the sin of covetousness. But this sin came at the instigation of the serpent, that is Satan, who himself had fallen from a position of glory because he had said in his heart, " *I will be like the most High.*" (Isa.14:14) He coveted that which belonged only to God and he deceived Eve into thinking the same covetous thoughts. Paul says, "*Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.*" (Col.3:5 ESV) As stated in the opening paragraph, covetousness lies behind the breach of every command in the Decalogue.

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But there is a positive side to covetousness or desire. The same word translated covet in the 10th Commandment is used in a positive way by King David when he extols the virtues of God's Law. He says that the Law is "*More to be desired . . . than gold, Yea, than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.*" (Ps.19:10 KJV) To get the full import of what David is expressing in this verse, let's take our Bibles and read it in context from verse 7 to verse11.

Paul suggests that we "*covet [desire] earnestly the best gifts*" of the spirit (1Cor.12:31KJV; cf.14:30 and other translations). The Greek word he uses is 'zēloō', from which the English word 'zeal' is derived, and is variously translated as zealous, desire, envy or jealous (i.e. jealous with a positive spin; cf.2 Cor.11:2). This word is used by Jesus in his message to the Laodicean church where He says, "*I correct and discipline everyone I love. So be diligent* [zealous*] and turn from your indifference*." (Rev.3:19)

The problem in the Laodicean church was self-satisfaction, "*'I am rich. I have everything I want. I don't need a thing!' And you don't realize that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked.*" (V.17) Theirs was a covetousness that led to complacency. They are admonished to be zealous to obtain, that is to covet or desire earnestly, the products Christ has to offer. He is the heavenly Merchantman who says, "*buy gold from me—gold that has been purified by fire. Then you will be rich. Also buy white garments from me so you will not be shamed by your nakedness, and ointment for your eyes so you will be able to see."*

There are three items on offer. Firstly, the "*gold of truth, faith, and love*"; secondly, "*the white raiment of Christ's pure character* "; and lastly, "*heavenly eyesalve that [we] might discern with astonishment the utter worthlessness of creature merit to earn the wages of eternal life.*" (EGW, Faith I Live By, p.306; Faith and Works, p.23)

Discussion

1. We are said to be rational, thinking and reasoning beings. Consider how a 'rational being', like Eve - like ourselves, can come to an irrational covetous response through the processes of reasoning.
2. To what extent do preferences, conformity, expectations, selectiveness, impulsiveness, perceptions and circular reasoning play a role in covetous conclusions? Explore the impact of these and other biases that impact the rationality of our reasoning.
3. In all honesty, where do we sit in the Laodicean picture? What part does covetousness play?
4. Jesus said, "*But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness . . .*" In light of what we have read, in what way is this a call to covet? Can we possibly covet the kingdom of God and His righteousness for the wrong reasons?

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Expressions of Covetousness - Discuss each individually.

1. **Misplaced desire**
   a. **Example** - "Satan was determined to succeed in his temptation of the sinless Adam and Eve. And he could reach even this holy pair more successfully through the medium of appetite than in any other way. The fruit of the forbidden tree seemed pleasant to the eye and desirable to the taste. They ate and fell." (EGW, Confrontation, pp. 15-16)
   b. **Remedy** - "*So you should earnestly desire the most helpful gifts. But now let me show you a way of life that is best of all. . . . Three things will last forever—faith, hope, and love—and the greatest of these is love.*" (1Cor. 12:31; 13:13)
2. **Pride**
   a. **Example** - "*Beware of these teachers of religious law! For they like to parade around in flowing robes and love to receive respectful greetings as they walk in the marketplaces. And how they love the seats of honor in the synagogues and the head table at banquets. Yet they shamelessly cheat widows out of their property and then pretend to be pious by making long prayers in public.*" (Luke 20:46-47)
   b. **Remedy** - "*All of you, serve each other in humility, for "God opposes the proud but favors the humble." So humble yourselves under the mighty power of God, and at the right time he will lift you up in honor.*" (1 Pet.5:5-6)
3. **Greed**
   a. **Example** - "*Then [Jesus] told them a story: "A rich man had a fertile farm that produced fine crops. He said to himself, 'What should I do? I don't have room for all my crops.' Then he said, 'I know! I'll tear down my barns and build bigger ones. Then I'll have room enough to store all my wheat and other goods. And I'll sit back and say to myself, "My friend, you have enough stored away for years to come. Now take it easy! Eat, drink, and be merry!"'*" (Luke 12:16-19)
   b. **Remedy** - "*Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and he will give you everything you need. . . . Sell your possessions and give to those in need. This will store up treasure for you in heaven! *" (Vs.31,33FP)
4. **Materialism**
   a. **Example** - "*. . . a man came running up to him* [Jesus]*, knelt down, and asked, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"*" Jesus pointed to the Ten Commandments to which "*the man replied, "I've obeyed all these commandments since I was young." . . . "There is still one thing you haven't done," he told him. "Go and sell all your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." At this the man's face fell, and he went away sad, for he had many possessions.*" (Mark 10:17-22)

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8. **Ignoring, Silence and neglect** - "If [we] could see the tender love of Christ, [how] He reached to the very depths of human woe and misery. What right, then, [have we] to give the cold shoulder to another? . . . What account will [we] render for [our] Phariseeism, for standing apart from [our] brother [or sister], leaving him [or her] to the devil's temptations?" (EGW, Manuscript Releases Vol.13, p. 245)

Time to Share

1. Let's take time to share the impact of words on our lives. How we have been affected by positive and/or negative verbal and non-verbal experiences.
2. Share experiences where you have been misunderstood or you have misunderstood others. How do you deal with the complications that can arise from such situations?

Words of Wisdom

"*Listen as Wisdom calls out! Hear as understanding raises her voice! Listen to me! For I have important things to tell you. Everything I say is right, for I speak the truth and detest every kind of deception. My advice is wholesome. There is nothing devious or crooked in it. My words are plain to anyone with understanding, clear to those with knowledge.*" (Prov.8:1, 6-9)

"*Wise words are like deep waters; wisdom flows from the wise like a bubbling brook.*" (Prov.18:4)

"*An honest witness tells the truth; . . . A truthful witness saves lives*" (Prov.12:17;14:25)

"*Too much talk leads to sin. Be sensible and keep your mouth shut.*" (Prov.10:19)

"*Don't make rash promises, . . . let your words be few.*" (Eccl.5:2)

"*Wise words bring approval, but fools are destroyed by their own words. Fools base their thoughts on foolish assumptions, so their conclusions will be wicked madness; they chatter on and on. No one really knows what is going to happen; no one can predict the future.*" (Eccl.10:12-14)

"*Just say a simple, 'Yes, I will,' or 'No, I won't.' Anything beyond this is from the evil one.*" (Matt 5:37)

"*But most of all, my brothers and sisters, never take an oath, by heaven or earth or anything else. Just say a simple yes or no, so that you will not sin and be condemned.*" (James 5:12)

"*Everyone spoke well of him and was amazed by the gracious words that came from his lips.*" (Luke 4:22) In every way, in word and in deed, Jesus is our example.

LET THIS PRAYER BE CONSTANTLY ON OUR LIPS

"May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing to you, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer."

(Ps.19:14)

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The scriptures are replete with messages that remind us to watch what we say, and how and why we say it. How and what we communicate is totally dependant on what we are thinking and, unfortunately, our thinking can easily get twisted. In an earlier lesson, we learnt that there are at least ten forms of twisted thinking that can impact our responses to life situations. Let's look at three terms that are used to describe the types of communication we engage in. Note that, as we discuss each term, we will be using each of them interactively to identify characteristics of our communications and their significance to our understanding of each other.

1. **Intrapersonal communication** - this includes internal or audible self-talk, our responses to our senses, note writing and even body language. Such communication continues whether we are with others or not. We may even indulge in self-deception. A biblical example of this inner dialogue is found in the story of the flood when God "*saw that everything [man] thought or imagined was consistently and totally evil.*" (Gen.6:5)
2. **Body language** - non-verbal communication conveyed through body movement, facial expression and touch represent the major part of any interpersonal interaction. Some body-language is innate to all while others reflect cultural norms. Clearly, body-language can change. Paul saw it in the lives of the Corinthian believers when he wrote, "*Clearly, you are a letter from Christ showing the result of our ministry among you. This "letter" is written not with pen and ink, but with the Spirit of the living God. It is carved not on tablets of stone, but on human hearts . . . [and] everyone can read it.*" (2Cor.3:3,2) Peter adds, "*Be careful to live properly among your unbelieving neighbors.*" (1Pet.2:12)
3. **Interpersonal communication** - includes that which is verbalized orally or is written. Word selection, language construct, intonation, rate of delivery coupled with body language make up much of our day to day communication. Written communication must depend on word selection and language construct alone to convey the message. David, in a prayer of praise, declared, "*May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing to you, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.*" (Ps. 19:14)

These three types of communicating are integrative in group dynamics and cross-cultural communication and are expressed in positive and negative ways. As we examine the negatives of communication let us explore the positive alternatives.

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Problems with Communication

Jeremiah records the destitute state of Judea and Jerusalem and the anguish of God as He considers 'His people'. "*"My people bend their tongues like bows to shoot out lies. They refuse to stand up for the truth. They only go from bad to worse. They do not know me," says the LORD.*

"Beware of your neighbor! Don't even trust your brother! For brother takes advantage of brother, and friend slanders friend. They all fool and defraud each other; no one tells the truth. With practiced tongues they tell lies; they wear themselves out with all their sinning. They pile lie upon lie and utterly refuse to acknowledge me," says the LORD. . . .

"For their tongues shoot lies like poisoned arrows. They speak friendly words to their neighbors while scheming in their heart to kill them." (Jer.9:3-6,8)

The wisest of men says, "*People may cover their hatred with pleasant words, but they're deceiving you. They pretend to be kind, but don't believe them. Their hearts are full of many evils. While their hatred may be concealed by trickery, their wrongdoing will be exposed in public.*

"If you set a trap for others, you will get caught in it yourself. If you roll a boulder down on others, it will crush you instead. A lying tongue hates its victims, and flattering words cause ruin." (Prov. 26:24-28)

While Jesus hung in agony on the cross "*The people passing by shouted abuse, shaking their heads in mockery. "Ha! Look at you now!" they yelled at him. "You said you were going to destroy the Temple and rebuild it in three days. Well then, save yourself and come down from the cross!"*

"The leading priests and teachers of religious law also mocked Jesus. "He saved others," they scoffed, "but he can't save himself! Let this Messiah, this King of Israel, come down from the cross so we can see it and believe him!" Even the men who were crucified with Jesus ridiculed him." (Mark 15:29-32; cf. Luke 23:39-43)

Discussion: - Consider the descriptive scriptures above and how they relate to the following list of negative forms of communications, and their references and statements.

1. **Lying and deceit** -"*The LORD detests lying lips, but he delights in those who tell the truth.*" (Prov.12:22) "*I said in my haste, "All men are liars."* (Ps.116:11 NKJV) "*Telling lies about others is as harmful as hitting them with an ax, wounding them with a sword, or shooting them with a sharp arrow.*" (Prov.25:18) "*But . . . all liars shall have their part in . . . the second death.*" (Rev.21:8 NKJV)
2. **Slander and mockery** - In a list of evils characterizing the wicked, God says, "*You sit around and slander your brother.*" (Ps.50:20) David felt the sting of slander. He writes, "*I am constantly hounded by those who slander me, and many are boldly attacking me.*" (Ps.56:2) Paul says, "*some people even slander us by claiming that we say, "The more we sin, the better it is!"* (Rom.3:8) He speaks of people who have "*an unhealthy desire to quibble over the meaning of words. This stirs up arguments ending in jealousy, division, slander, and evil suspicions.*" (1Tim. 6:4) Consider how these verses relate to Jesus' experience on the cross. (Look at other translations)
3. **Gossip** - Gossip is closely related to slander. The Lord says,"*Do not spread slanderous gossip among your people.*" (Lev.19:16) "*Wrongdoers eagerly listen to gossip; liars pay close attention to slander.*" (Prov.17:4) The wise man also said, "*A gossip goes around telling secrets, so don't hang around with chatterers. . .Gossip separates the best of friends. . . quarrels disappear when gossip stops."* (Prov.20:19; 16:28; 26:20)
4. **Verbal abuse** - "A pure fountain will not send forth an impure stream, neither will a true Christian utter words of abuse." (EGW, This Day with God, p.320) "*The people passing by shouted abuse, shaking their heads in mockery. "Ha! Look at you now!" they yelled at him. "You said you were going to destroy the Temple and rebuild it in three days. Well then, save yourself and come down from the cross!"* " (Mark 15:29-30) Paul speaks of his and his co-worker's response to abuse, "*We bless those who curse us. We are patient with those who abuse us.*" (1 Cor.4:12)
5. **Foul language, profanity, and swearing** -"*If we could control our tongues, we would be perfect and could also control ourselves in every other way. . . People can tame all kinds of animals, . . . but no one can tame the tongue. It is restless and evil, full of deadly poison. Sometimes it praises our Lord and Father, and sometimes it curses those who have been made in the image of God. And so blessing and cursing come pouring out of the same mouth. Surely, my brothers and sisters, this is not right! "* (James 3:2,7-10) "*But now is the time to get rid of anger, rage, malicious behavior, slander, and dirty language.*" (Col.3:8) "*Don't use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them. . . Obscene stories, foolish talk, and coarse jokes—these are not for you. Instead, let there be thankfulness to God. "* (Eph.4:29; 5:4) Jesus declares, "*I tell you this, you must give an account on judgment day for every idle word you speak. The words you say will either acquit you or condemn you.*" (Matt. 12:36-37)
6. **Verbal and non-verbal innuendo, slurs and insults** - "*Whoever winks maliciously causes grief, and a chattering fool comes to ruin. . . What are worthless and wicked people like? They are constant liars, signaling their deceit with a wink of the eye, a nudge of the foot, or the wiggle of fingers.*" (Prov.10:10 NIV; 6:12-13) "*People will oppress each other - man against man, neighbor against neighbor. Young people will insult their elders, and vulgar people will sneer at the honorable.*" (Isa.3:5) "*Don't repay evil for evil. Don't retaliate with insults when people insult you. Instead, pay them back with a blessing. That is what God has called you to do, and he will bless you for it.*" (1 Pet.3:9) "*If you insult your father or mother, your light will be snuffed out in total darkness.*" (Prov.20:20)
7. **Criticism, complaining, flattery and scoffing** - "*These people are grumblers and complainers . . .They brag loudly about themselves, and they flatter others to get what they want. . . The apostles . . . told you that in the last times there would be scoffers (mockers) whose purpose in life is to satisfy their ungodly desires. These people are the ones who are creating divisions among you.*" (Jude 1:16-19)

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Make Way for the God of Peace

The babe who was born to bear the names "*Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father,* [and] *Prince of Peace*"(Isa.9:6) was heralded into this world by a retinue of Angels who proclaimed, "*Glory to God in highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased."* (Luke 2:14)

"*Now may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.*" (Heb 13:20-21) The God of Peace seeks to reestablish peace on earth through Jesus. Ultimate peace comes when Christ restores this earth to its pristine state and eliminates every trace of discord from this earth.

"*Now may the God of peace make you holy in every way, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ comes again.*" (1 Thess.5:23 NIV) While we wait for that glorious event, He assures us that we can have peace right now.

Receiving God's Promise of Peace

Peace can only be a reality in our lives as we willingly and humbly submit all that we are to the hands of our Creator. Go through the following acrostic and learn more about how we can receive God's promise of peace.

P	perfect peace	"*You will keep in perfect peace all who trust in you, all whose thoughts are fixed on you!* " (Isa.26:3)
E	experience and enjoy	"*Great peace have those who love your law; nothing can make them stumble.*" (Ps.119:165 ESV) "*Look at those who are honest and good, for a wonderful future awaits those who love peace.*" (Ps.37:37) "*I will teach all your children, and they will enjoy great peace.*" (Is.54:13)
A	accept the gift	"*Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; . . . Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.*" (John 14:27)
C	covenant of peace confirmed	"*And this I say, that the law, . . . cannot annul the covenant that was confirmed before by God in Christ, that it should make the promise of no effect.*" (Gal.3:17 NKJV)
E	express	"*God blesses those who work for peace, for they will be called the children of God.*" (Matt.5:9)

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Life for Horatio Spafford was all that a man could hope for. He was a successful lawyer and businessman happily married with four daughters and a son. A dedicated Presbyterian, he counted Dwight L. Moody, Ira Sankey and other well-known Christians of the day as his friends. Then, in 1870, tragedy struck. His son died of Scarlet Fever. The next year the Great Chicago Fire destroyed much of his property investments and left him financially ruined. Two years later he suffered further financial setbacks during an economic downturn at which he decided the family needed a break. They booked passage on the steamship, SS Ville du Havre, but just before sailing Horatio received news that meant that he had to stay behind while his family set sail for England. Tragically the SS Ville du Havre was rammed by another vessel and sank within twelve minutes taking 226 people to a watery grave, including his four daughters. Only his wife was saved. He took another ship to England to be with his grieving wife. As his ship passed near the place where his daughters had perished, he penned the words of the hymn, 'It is Well With My Soul', the first and fourth verses of which say:-

When peace like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to know,
It is well, it is well, with my soul.
For me, be it Christ, be it Christ hence to live:
If Jordan above me shall roll,
No pang shall be mine, for in death as in life,
Thou wilt whisper Thy peace to my soul.

Consider for a moment

1. We shudder at the tragedy and loss that befell Horatio Spafford and his wife. In similar circumstances how would we have responded?
2. Read again the words of Horatio's hymn line by line. Try to imagine the mental processes that went into forming each line. Where did the peace come from?
3. Amongst the last words Jesus spoke to His disciples were these, "*I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don't be troubled or afraid.*" (John 14:27) These words would have been familiar to Horatio Spafford, Had he accepted the gift?

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The Covenant of Peace

Just prior to His arrest and crucifixion, Jesus reassured His disciples with these words, "*Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.*" (John 14:27 NKJV) Peace is a gift of love that is ours to accept, experience and weave into the warp and woof of our lives until it becomes a part of our very being.

The Lord seeks an everlasting covenant of peace with us because of His great love for us. Through Isaiah He says, "*Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed," says the LORD, who has compassion on you. . . All your children will be taught by the LORD, and great will be their peace.* " (Isa.54:10,13 NIV) Embedded in these words God gives us a powerful pledge of His good intentions for us. Because of His unfailing and everlasting love for us, he offers us this wonderfully assuring covenant of peace.

"Human love may change, but Christ's love knows no change. When we cry to Him for help, His hand is stretched out to save. . . The weaker and more helpless you know yourself to be, the stronger will you become in His strength. The heavier your burdens, the more blessed the rest in casting them upon your Burden Bearer. . . Wherever we may be, He is at our right hand, to support, maintain, uphold, and cheer. Greater than the love of a mother for her child is Christ's love for His redeemed. It is our privilege to rest in His love, to say, "I will trust Him; for He gave His life for me." (EGW, The Ministry of Healing, p.72)

"The most striking feature of this covenant of peace is the exceeding richness of the pardoning mercy expressed to the sinner if he repents and turns from his sin. The Holy Spirit describes the gospel as salvation through the tender mercies of our God. "I will be merciful to their unrighteousness," the Lord declares of those who repent, "and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more" (Heb.8:12)." (EGW, God's Amazing Grace, p.138)

Discussion

Consider all that is encompassed in God's covenant of peace, then read the following statement from James, the brother of Jesus, and determine what are the 'mountains' and 'hills' that stand in the way of our attaining peace. Are there any other obstacles that stand in the way of entering into God's covenant of peace?

> "*For wherever there is jealousy and selfish ambition, there you will find disorder and evil of every kind. But the wisdom from above is first of all pure. It is also peace loving, gentle at all times, and willing to yield to others. It is full of mercy and good deeds. It shows no favoritism and is always sincere. And those who are peacemakers will plant seeds of peace and reap a harvest of righteousness.* (James 3:16-18; read also Vs.13-15)

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The Pathway to Peace

There is a learning process in attaining peace of mind. Jesus said, "*"Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. **Let me teach you**, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls.*" (Matt.11:28-29)

As we have already noted, The Lord says, "*I will teach all your children, and they will enjoy great peace.*" (Is.54:13) Peace is a learning outcome for those who are willing pupils of the greater teacher, Jesus. He has taught us, both by word and example, how to live peaceably even in the face of trial and torment.

He not only instructs and models what it is to be at peace but gladly yokes himself to us so that as we traverse the learning pathway, He is right beside us, gently guiding us through those difficult moments when our peace is challenged by life circumstances. At these moments of difficulty, we are admonished by David to "*Give [our] burdens to the LORD, and he will take care of [us]. He will not permit the godly to slip and fall.*" (Ps.55:22)

This is not s short course but an ongoing process of refinement. Paul says, "*Keep putting into practice all you learned and received from me—everything you heard from me and saw me doing. Then the God of peace will be with you.*" (Phil.4:9) He says in another place, "*Dear brothers and sisters, Be joyful. Grow to maturity. Encourage each other. Live in harmony and peace. Then the God of love and peace will be with you.*" (2Cor.13:11)

Sometimes we may need correction. It may be a stubborn streak, or a rebellious, self-centered spirit that stands in the way of peace, or those mountains of jealousy and selfish ambition that the Lord needs to correct. We are told that "*The LORD disciplines those he loves . . . No discipline is enjoyable while it is happening—it's painful! But afterward there will be a peaceful harvest of right living for those who are trained in this way.*" (Heb. 12:6,11)

"*But the wisdom from above is first of all pure. It is also peace loving, gentle at all times, and willing to yield to others. It is full of mercy and good deeds. It shows no favoritism and is always sincere.*" (James 3:17)

What Have We Learned

1. What elements of our knowledge and experience base do we need to learn to unlearn so as to come to a place of peace?
2. What is the place of encouragement as we traverse the path to peace?
3. Take this opportunity to share an experience you may have had in your own pathway to peace.
4. The Psalmist prayed this prayer, "*Show me the right path, O LORD; point out the road for me to follow.*"(Ps.25:4) Discuss what it means to be really ready and willing to learn about peace at the feet of the great teacher.

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"*Then, calling the crowd to join his disciples, he said, "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross, and follow me.*" (Mark 8:34)

In Conclusion

W	wise and willing	"*But the wisdom from above is first of all pure. It is also peace loving, gentle at all times, and willing to yield to others. It is full of mercy and good deeds. It shows no favoritism and is always sincere.*" (Jam.3:17)
A	acknowledge	"*Acknowledge that the LORD is God! He made us, and we are his. We are his people, the sheep of his pasture.*" (Ps.100:3)
L	leadable	"*Lead me in the right path, O LORD . . . Make your way plain for me to follow.*" (Ps.5:8) "*Send out your light and your truth; let them guide me. Let them lead me to your holy mountain, to the place where you live.*" (Ps.43:3)
K	kind and considerate	"*In this new life . . . Christ is all that matters, and he lives in all of us. Since God chose [us] to be the holy people he loves, [we] must clothe [ourselves] with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.*" (Col.3:11-12)

W	whole hearted commitment	"*Let all that I am praise the LORD; with my whole heart, I will praise his holy name.*" (Ps. 103:1)
I	intimate	"*Learn to know . . God . . . intimately. Worship and serve him with your whole heart and a willing mind. . . .If you seek him, you will find him.*" (1Chron.28:9)
T	turn, take, trust	Jesus says, "*If any of you wants to be my follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross, and follow me.*" (Mark 8:34) "*I trust in God, so why should I be afraid? *" (Ps.56:11)
H	humble and holy	"The truly holy, who walk with God like Enoch of old, will . . . be courteous, humble, unselfish, free from spiritual pride and exaltation." (EGW, Life Sketches, pp. 211-212)

G	guided to glory	"*You guide me with your counsel, leading me to a glorious destiny.*" (Ps.73:24)
O	obedient	"*I have refused to walk on any evil path, so that I may remain obedient to your word.*" (Ps.119:101)
D	depend on God	"*So now, come back to your God. Act with love and justice, and always depend on him.*" (Hos.12:6)

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Hope and Healing

WALK WITH GOD

The mid-twentieth century tenor, Mario Lanza, made the song "I'll Walk With God" one of the most popular songs of the period. The Lyrics, written by Paul Francis Webster, contain these lines.

I'll walk with God from this day on, His helping hand, I'll lean upon.
This is my prayer, my humble plea, May the Lord be ever with me. . .

He will not fail me As long as my faith is strong, What ever road I may walk along.

I'll walk with God, I'll take His hand. I'll talk with God, He'll understand.
I'll pray to Him, each day to Him And He'll hear the words that I say. . .

And I'll never walk alone While I walk with God.

The Bible speaks a lot about walking with God and mentions two individuals specifically who had this intimate experience with their Lord.

1. The first person cited as walking with God is Enoch. Let's read what we know of his experience.

   "*When Jared was 162 years old, he became the father of Enoch. . . When Enoch was 65 years old, he became the father of Methuselah. After the birth of Methuselah, Enoch lived in close fellowship with God for another 300 years, and he had other sons and daughters. Enoch lived 365 years, walking in close fellowship with God. Then one day he disappeared, because God took him.*" (Gen.5:18,21-24)

   "*It was by faith that Enoch was taken up to heaven without dying—"he disappeared, because God took him." For before he was taken up, he was known as a person who pleased God. And it is impossible to please God without faith. Anyone who wants to come to him must believe that God exists and that he rewards those who sincerely seek him."* (Heb.11:5-6)

   "*Enoch, who lived in the seventh generation after Adam, prophesied about these people. He said, "Listen! The Lord is coming with countless thousands of his holy ones to execute judgment on the people of the world. He will convict every person of all the ungodly things they have done and for all the insults that ungodly sinners have spoken against him."* " (Jude 1:14-15; quoting from The Book of Enoch 1:9)

2. Three generations after Enoch, Noah is said to have walked with God. "*Noah found favor with the LORD. . . Noah was a righteous man, the only blameless person living on earth at the time, and he walked in close fellowship with God.*" (Gen.6:8-9)

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Discussion:

1. Drawing on what we have read so far, what elements are essential to a genuine walk with God?
2. Identify those elements of your experience that have impacted your relationship with the Lord either positively or negatively.
3. Discuss the implications of the directive declared by Micah in the following verse. "*He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?* " (Mic.6:8 NKJV)

The Nature of Walking With God

The prophet Amos asks the rhetorical question, "*Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?* " (Amos 3:3 NKJV) There must be a meshing of minds when we come to walk with God. Our will comes into harmony with His will. We accept His yolk and learn His ways (Matt.11:29) We "*let God transform [us] into a new person by changing the way [we] think. Then [we] will learn to know God's will for [us], which is good and pleasing and perfect.*" (Rom.12:2) So, when He says, "*This is the way you should go,*" we heed His direction without any question and walk willingly in His way (see Isa.30:21).

The noted twentieth-century American author and activist, Helen Keller, became deaf and blind at 19 months of age after suffering a serious illness. Her visually impaired teacher, Anne Sullivan, became her close friend and companion. Helen is credited with the saying, "I would rather walk with a friend in the dark than walk alone in the light." This saying, which was oh so true for her, is thought to have been derived from the following lines of an earlier published poem.

> "I would rather walk in the dark with God, than walk alone in the light;
> I would rather walk with Him by faith, than walk alone by sight."

There are few things so isolating as darkness. Fear of the dark is considered by some researchers as an expression of 'separation anxiety disorder'. Most of us would appreciate some company if we found ourselves in a strange, dark place. The Messianic 'suffering servant' speaks to us from the pages of Isaiah and says, "*If you are walking in darkness, without a ray of light, trust in the LORD and rely on your God.*" (Isa.50:10)

John the beloved declares, " *God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all.*" (1John 1:5 NKJV) So we, with the Psalmist, can plead, "*Send out your light and your truth; let them guide me.*" (Ps.43:3) We can take "*[His] word [as] a lamp to guide [our] feet and a light for [our] path.*" (Ps.119:105) So, "*even when [we] walk through the darkest valley, [we] will not be afraid, for [the Lord, our shepherd is] close beside [us]. . . [to] protect and comfort [us and] guides [us] along the right paths for his name's sake.*" (Ps.23:4,3 NLT & NIV)

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Paul adds another dimension to the picture of walking with God. He said, "*Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. . . For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.*" (Gal.5:16-18; Rom.8:2 NKJV) In Galatians, Paul goes on to list examples of the two types of thinking and behaviour that are contrary to each other, the works of the flesh and the fruits of the spirit. In our Spirit-led walk with God, the fruits of the Spirit will be manifest. They are " *love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.*" Paul then says, "*And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.*" (Gal.5:22-24 NKJV)

In this walk, we are surrounded by His presence. We have this assurance, "*Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the LORD will personally go ahead of you. He will be with you; he will neither fail you nor abandon you."* (Deut.31: 8) And while we gladly follow His leading, "*[our] own ears will hear him. Right behind [us] a voice will say, "This is the way you should go," whether to the right or to the left.*" (Isa.30:21). Isaiah confirms God's all-encompassing presence with these words, "*the LORD will go ahead of you; yes, the God of Israel will protect you from behind*" (Isa.52:12) and, as already noted, "*[the Lord, our shepherd is] close beside [us]* " (Ps.23:4) With such a presence we can walk with humble confidence.

Meditate on our walk - take time to share

Admonitions on Walking With God

"*But be very careful to obey all the commands and the instructions that Moses gave to you. Love the LORD your God, walk in all his ways, obey his commands, hold firmly to him, and serve him with all your heart and all your soul.*" (Josh.22:5)

"*Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the LORD, and who meditates on his law day and night.*" (Ps.1:1-2 NIV)

"Those who have experienced the cleansing efficacy of the blood of Christ upon their hearts will be like their Master, pure, peaceable, and lowly of heart. . . The truly holy, who walk with God like Enoch of old, will not be boastful of their purity, but be courteous, humble, unselfish, free from spiritual pride and exaltation. Those who know most of God, and keep their eye fixed on the Author and Finisher of their faith will see nothing good or great in themselves. They will feel, after doing all in their power to be faithful, that they are yet unprofitable servants." (EGW, Life Sketches, pp. 211-212)

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d. “It is to be our eager desire to do as He has done, to live as He lived, that others, seeing our good works, may be led to glorify God. The Lord's blessing will rest upon us as we seek to bless others by doing the work that Christ came to this world to teach us how to do.” (EGW. The Upward Look, p.117)

Growing in Glory

1. As noted in the introduction, we are walking by faith in a covenantal relationship with our Lord. We are feeding on His life-giving Word that lifts the veil of our ignorance and misunderstanding. With increasing clarity of spiritual vision, we come to “*see and reflect the glory of the Lord. And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image.*” (2Cor.3:18) What good news! What glorious news!!

2. “*May God give [us] more and more grace and peace as [we] grow in [our] knowledge of God and Jesus our Lord. By his divine power, God has given us everything we need for living a godly life. We have received all of this by coming to know him, the one who called us to himself by means of his marvelous glory and excellence. And because of his glory and excellence, he has given us great and precious promises. These are the promises that enable [us] to share his divine nature and escape the world's corruption caused by human desires.*

   “*In view of all this,* [let us] *make every effort to respond to God's promises.* [Let us] *[s]upplement [our] faith with a generous provision of moral excellence, and moral excellence with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with patient endurance, and patient endurance with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love for everyone.*

   “*The more [we] grow like this, the more productive and useful [we] will be in [our] knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.*” (2Pet.1:2-8 rendered in the first person)

3. “*But we are citizens of heaven, where the Lord Jesus Christ lives. And we are eagerly waiting for him to return as our Savior. He will take our weak mortal bodies and change them into glorious bodies like his own, using the same power with which he will bring everything under his control.*” (Phil.3:20-21)

Let us Give God the Glory through Personal Testimony -

As we take this opportunity to write and share our personal testimony, consider how this well known Fanny Crosby hymn harmonizes with the sentiments of our hearts?

> “To God be the glory, Great things He has done. . . Praise the Lord, praise the Lord . . . And give Him the glory; great things He [has] done.”

My personal testimony: . . . . . .

.. . .

.. . .

.. . .

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Hope and Healing

GIVE GOD THE GLORY

As we have climbed together the steps to Hope and Healing, we have confronted who we are, we have developed a deeper appreciation for God’s goodness and grace, we have found in Him the healing we have so desperately needed for our character flaws and failings, and we have come to the place where we can sing . . .

Just a closer walk with Thee, Grant it, Jesus, is my plea,
Daily walking close to Thee, Let it be, dear Lord, let it be.

Because we are walking in close, “unveiled” covenantal relationship with the Lord, we can, with Paul, say, “*So all of us who have had that veil removed can see and reflect the glory of the Lord. And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image.*” (2Cor.3:18) This is good, indeed glorious news. This is the good news that John heard proclaimed by the first of the three angels of Revelation 14. John says,

> “*And I saw another angel flying through the sky, carrying the eternal Good News to proclaim to the people who belong to this world—to every nation, tribe, language, and people. "**Fear God**," he shouted. "**Give glory to him.** For the time has come when he will sit as judge. **Worship him** who made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and all the springs of water."* ” (Rev.14:6-7 highlighting supplied)

This “*eternal Good News*” message contains three imperatives that we ignore to our eternal loss. When the angel says “fear God” he isn’t talking about a ‘run away’ type of fear but a supreme level of awe and respect that engenders reverential obedience. Nor does it negate the confidence or boldness we are urged to have in seeking God’s grace (see Heb.4:16) but rather such reverence prevents our ‘boldness’ from becoming arrogance, or our confidence becoming presumption. Without this ‘fear’ we cannot give glory to God nor can we truly worship Him. The psalmist reflects this same sentiment when he says,

> “*The LORD merely spoke, and the heavens were created. He breathed the word, and all the stars were born. He assigned the sea its boundaries and locked the oceans in vast reservoirs. Let the whole world fear the LORD, and let everyone stand in awe of him. For when he spoke, the world began! It appeared at his command.*” (Ps.33:6-9; review all of Ps. 33)

Let the words of Richard Mullins’ gospel song resonate in our hearts as we pause to contemplate and then share our praise for our awesome God.

“Our God is an awesome God, He reigns from heaven above
With wisdom, power, and love, Our God is an awesome God.”

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Living to God's Glory

The 17th Century Westminster Confession, formulated by the leading Puritans of the day, begins with the question, "What is the chief purpose for which man is made?" The answer provided in the Confession is, "The chief purpose for which man is made is to glorify God . . ." This declaration is founded on a number of salient scriptures that not only give us a rational reason for giving God glory but also indicate ways we can.

1. **Why give God glory?** - "*Our Lord and God, You are worthy to receive glory and honor and power, because You have created all things, and because of Your will they exist and were created.*" (Rev 4:11HCSB)
2. **How to live so as to give glory to God** -
   a. **By living life to His glory** - "*Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.*" (1Cor.6:19-20 ESV)
   "*So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. . . .* " Paul goes on to say, "*I, too, try to please everyone in everything I do. I don't just do what is best for me; I do what is best for others so that many may be saved.*" (1Cor.10:31,33) This is a true expression of the Golden Rule and the next to greatest but equally important command, "*Love your neighbor as yourself.*" (Matt.22:39; cf. Lev.19:18)
   b. **By bearing fruit** - Jesus says, "*When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father.*" (John 15:8) Paul reiterates this point when he instructs us to "*walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.*" (Col.1:10 ESV) He speaks elsewhere of the Spirit prompted fruit of "*love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control* " as expressed "*in all goodness and righteousness and truth.*" (Gal.5:22-23; Eph.5:9) The Lord, through Isaiah, says, "*Your people shall all be righteous . . . that I might be glorified.*" (Isa.60:21 ESV)
   c. **Glorifying God through good deeds** - After presenting to us the Beatitudes, Jesus instructs us to "*Let [our] light so shine before men, that they may see [our] good works and glorify [our] Father in heaven."* (Matt.5:16 NKJV) "Faith and good works should go hand in hand in relieving the afflicted among us, and in fitting them to glorify God here and to be saved at the coming of Christ." (EGW, Counsels on Diet and Food, p.26)
   d. **By Modeling Christ-likeness** - "*But if anyone suffers as a "Christian," he should not be ashamed but should glorify God in having that name.*" (1Pet.4:16 HCSB) Jesus demonstrated what He meant by humble service when He washed His disciple's feet. He said, "*I have given you an example to follow. Do as I have done to you.*" (John 13:15) Paul adds, "*Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.*" (Gal.6:2 NKJV)

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Glorifying God as a Community and in the Community

1. **Through Corporate Worship** -
   a. **Unity in diversity** - David declares, "*All the nations you have made will come and worship before you, Lord; they will bring glory to your name.*" (Ps. 86:9 NIV) God is glorified when we, as peoples from divergent cultures, come together in corporate worship and unity. Paul's prayer was, "*May God . . . help you live in complete harmony with each other, as is fitting for followers of Christ Jesus. Then all of you can join together with one voice, giving praise and glory to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, accept each other just as Christ has accepted you so that God will be given glory*" (Rom.15:5-7)
   b. **Giving thanks** - The psalmist, Asaph, brings us this message from God. "*[G]iving thanks is a sacrifice that truly honors* [glorifies] *me. . .*" (Ps.50:23) Not only do we need to give thanks verbally but we each can bring an attitude of gratitude into our congregational interactions. Such an attitude enhances unity and, in so doing, brings glory to God.
   c. **The glory of giving** - "*Give to the LORD the glory due His name; Bring an offering, and come before Him. Oh, worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness!* " (1Chron.16:29 NKJV; cf. Ps.29:1-2) The hymn penned by John Monsell reflects the sentiments of this admonition.

      Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness;
      Bow down before Him, His glory proclaim;
      Gold of obedience and incense of lowliness
      bring, and adore him; the Lord is his Name.

   d. **Giving God the glory through songs and music** - "*Sing a new song of praise to him; play skillfully on the harp, and sing with joy. . . . Shout joyful praises to God, all the earth! Sing about the glory of his name! Tell the world how glorious he is.*" (Ps.33:3; 66:1-2)
   e. Let us read all of King David's song of praise as recorded in Psalm 145 - What can we learn about giving glory to God from this psalm? Make a list of the different ways we can glorify God. Note also Ephesians 5:19-20.
2. **Glorifying God in the Community**
   a. "*Be careful to live properly among your unbelieving neighbors. Then even if they accuse you of doing wrong, they will see your honorable behavior, and they will give honor* [glory] *to God when he judges the world.*" (1Pet.2:12)
   b. "God has given every man talents, that his name may be exalted; not that man may be lauded and praised, honored and glorified, while the Giver is forgotten. Let those around you see that you give God the glory. Let self be crucified; let God appear". (EGW, Review and Herald, September 12, 1899)
   c. "*All people will fear; they will proclaim the works of God and ponder what he has done. The righteous will rejoice in the LORD and take refuge in him; all the upright in heart will glory in him!*" (Isa.64:9-10)

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5. **Ambassadors** - "*God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, . . . And he gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation. So we are Christ's ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, "Come back to God!"* (2Cor.5:19-20)

Summary

L	Looking to Jesus	. . . drawing from Him knowledge and strength and grace, [we] can impart His consolation to others, because the Comforter is with [us]. (EGW, My Life Today, p.230)
I	inspired by Jesus	The Lord Jesus is our . . . inspiration; and as we place ourselves in His hands, to be channels of light, our means of doing good will never be exhausted. (EGW, Christian Service, p.261)
V	valued by Jesus	Jesus valued every human being, and could not endure the thought that one soul should perish. (EGW, The Review and Herald, April 14, 1896)
I	imitating Jesus	Christians . . strive to keep . . the path of simplicity, meekness, and humility, imitating . . Jesus. (EGW, Counsels on Health, p.280)
N	new life in Christ	Let the Spirit of Christ control you. Let the law of kindness . . . mark the words and actions of those who . . . live the new life in Christ. (EGW, God's Amazing Grace, p.299)
G	giving God glory	To give glory to God is to reveal His character in our own. (EGW, SDA Bible Commentary, Vol.7, p.979)

L	loving as He loved	If we are His children we are bound together in the bonds of Christian brotherhood, loving one another as He has loved us. (EGW, Ye Shall Receive Power, p.49)
E	expressing His character	Christ has required that all who believe in His name should become His witnesses, bearing His message to the world, and expressing His character. (EGW, Manuscript Releases, Vol.16, p.193)
T	truthful	A truthful man, a man of integrity, will not designedly produce impressions by language or signs that are not strictly true. (EGW, The Signs of the Times, July 22, 1880)
T	trustworthy	Trustworthiness in your place and calling, a willingness to deny self for the purpose of benefitting others, will bring peace of mind and the favor of God. (EGW, Testimonies for the Church Vol.4, p.353)
E	emulate Him	The Son of God has set an example for all his followers. They are . . . to emulate his life of purity and self-denial at whatever cost. (EGW, The Signs of the Times, February 2, 1882)
R	representing Him	In this world we are to be representatives of Christ . . . for in representing Him we are representing the Father. (EGW, Peter's Counsel to Parents, p.25}
S	serving our Saviour	He whose heart is fixed to serve God will find opportunity to witness for Him. (EGW, Acts of the Apostles, p.467)

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Hope and Healing

ON BEING A LIVING LETTER

The Apostle Paul, in a letter, addressed to the believers in Corinth, says that their lives were analogous to a letter. He wrote, "*You yourselves are our **letter of recommendation**, written on your hearts, to be **known and read by all men**; and you show that **you are a letter from Christ** delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.*" (2Cor.3:2-3) RSV) Our lives convey messages that are read and understood by others. Every thought and action is etched into our lives and impacts how others read us.

Whether we like it or not, like a personal Rosetta stone, our past experience impacts our present revelation in some way. Jeremiah uses stone mason imagery to describe the impact of sin on the peoples of his day. He writes, "*The sin of Judah is inscribed with an iron chisel—engraved with a diamond point on their stony hearts . . .*" (Jer.17:1) What has been engraved into our being cannot be erased except by a complete rewrite on a new slate by the Master Mason himself. That is why He has promised a radical heart replacement for those of us who respond to His cleansing, saving initiative. He places His very own spirit within us to work renewal, to rewrite our story, to bring out the beauty of His character from the ashes of our own self-destructive desires.

> "*'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: . . I will give [you] singleness of heart and put a new spirit within [you]. I will take away [your] stony, stubborn heart and give [you] a tender, responsive heart, so [you] will obey my decrees and regulations. Then [you] will truly be my people, and I will be [your] God.*" (Ezek.11:16,19-20 rendered in the second person) The Lord says to those who are His spiritual Israel, "*I will put my instructions deep within [you], and I will write them on [your] hearts. I will be [your] God, and [you] will be my people.*" (Jer. 31:33 rendered in the second person)

Christ - The Master Model of a Living Letter

1. In one of the Messianic messages recorded by Isaiah, he conveys the news of Christ's glorious commission to those who long for restoration from brokenness, bondage, bereavement, and poverty of spirit. Isaiah wrote,

> "*The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is upon me, for the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to comfort the brokenhearted and to proclaim that captives will be released and prisoners will be freed. He has sent me to tell those who mourn that the time of the LORD's favor has come, . . . he will give a crown of beauty for ashes, a joyous blessing instead of mourning, festive praise instead of despair. In their righteousness, they will be like great oaks that the LORD has planted for his own glory.*" (Isa.61:1-3)

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One Sabbath, Early in His ministry, Jesus read from this part of Isaiah in His hometown of Nazareth then said, "*This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.*" Luke tells us that "*all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth.*" (Luke 4:21-22) But when Jesus pointed out that their familiarity with Him as the son of Joseph would mitigate against their acceptance of His divinely appointed message and mission, they became angry and sought to harm Him (Vs. 28-29).

2. Some three and a half years later, when Jesus was nearing the end of His ministry, He was preparing His disciples for the tumultuous events they were soon to experience. It is clear, from a couple of questions they asked, that they were not apprehending all that Jesus was telling them. Let's pick up the dialogue as recorded by John.

   "*When everything is ready, I will come and get you, so that you will always be with me where I am. And you know the way to where I am going."*

   "No, we don't know, Lord," Thomas said. "We have no idea where you are going, so how can we know the way?"

   Jesus told him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me. If you had really known me, you would know who my Father is. From now on, you do know him and have seen him!"

   Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied."

   Jesus replied, "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and yet you still don't know who I am? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father! So why are you asking me to show him to you? . . ." (John 14:3-9)

3. Evidence that the living letter of the life of Jesus had impacted His disciples is demonstrated by an experience of Peter and John when their involvement in the miraculous healing of a lame man and the subsequent opportunity to preach the good news of the gospel led to their arrest and arraignment before the Sanhedrin.

   "*The members of the council were amazed when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, for they could see that they were ordinary men with no special training in the Scriptures. They also recognized them as men who had been with Jesus.*" (Acts 4:13; cf. context in Acts 3 and 4)

   John later introduced his first epistle with words that express succinctly the impact that his personal relationship with Christ had on his own witness.

   "*We proclaim to you the one who existed from the beginning, whom we have heard and seen. We saw him with our own eyes and touched him with our own hands. He is the Word of life.*" (1John 1:1)

4. **What we can learn:**

   a. Our familiar friends and family may be slow in picking up, perceiving, or accepting the message of our changed lives. Jesus had been a familiar carpenter in Nazareth but now He was Messiah, the living revelation of God Himself.

      i. **Discuss Jesus experience in His hometown.**

      ii. **Share and discuss how others read your life in Christ.**

   b. What can we learn from Thomas and Philip who were continually with Jesus for some 3 years but couldn't fully grasp His message or even who He was?

   c. Read Matthew 25:31-46. In light of the judgment, discuss the relationship between Christ's glorious commission and our commission and mission.

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A Living Witness of His Love and Grace

1. **A call to witnessing** - "*"But you are my witnesses . . . !" says the LORD. "You are my servant. You have been chosen to know me, believe in me, and understand that I alone am God. There is no other God—there never has been, and there never will be. I, yes I, am the LORD, and there is no other Savior. . . You are witnesses that I am the only God," says the LORD.*" (Isa 43:10-12)

   The very last words Jesus spoke to His disciples just before He ascended into heaven parallel the declaration we have just read from the pen of Isaiah. Jesus said,

   "*But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.*" (Acts 1:8)

2. **A full expression of His love** - "*No one has ever seen God. But if we love each other, God lives in us, and **his love is brought to full expression** in us. And God has given us his Spirit as proof that we live in him and he in us. Furthermore, we have seen with our own eyes and now testify that the Father sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. All who confess that Jesus is the Son of God have God living in them, and they live in God. . . God is love, and all who live in love live in God, and God lives in them. And as we live in God, our love grows more perfect.*" (1John 4:12-17)

3. **Living honorable lives** "*It is God's will that your honorable lives should silence those ignorant people who make foolish accusations against you. . . . Respect everyone, and love your Christian brothers and sisters. Fear God, and respect the king. . . For God is pleased with you when you do what you know is right and patiently endure unfair treatment. . . For God called you to do good, even if it means suffering, just as Christ suffered for you. He is your example, and you must follow in his steps.*" (1Pet.2:15,17,19 and 21)

4. **Humble fellowship and service** - "*But we don't need to write to you about the importance of loving each other, for God himself has taught you to love one another. . . Make it your goal to live a quiet life, minding your own business and working with your hands, just as we instructed you before. Then people who are not Christians will respect the way you live . . .*" (1Thess.4:9,11-12)

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